

Alex Zarate

Thesis Project

10 November 2024

Script

Introduction

Looking at how technology has progressed throughout the years has left me quite a few questions. Are we moving too fast? Are we going against our morality? Do we care? Violence and hate crimes against minorities such as immigrants have been an all-time high now even more since the election has ended. On the other hand, technology has yet to garner such criticism. Even though it has done us more bad than good. While I say this, immigrants have been the backbone of the US not only in the agriculture category but also financially. It would seem that caring for others is nonexistent. With a visual essay, I will look into these questions and bring awareness and appreciation towards the immigrant people that came to the US for a better life. Through the form of a visual essay, I will use ink, watercolor, graphite, along with line work and collage to convey the discrimination and real-life stories of immigrant families. The Visual essay will look into the lens of an immigrant named Valeria who moves to a city where technology triumphs.

Context

As of recent new technology has been getting more praised for being helpful and even a lifesaving. With that however come more negatives than positives. Why are we letting AI take control of jobs that require human interaction? Why are we on our knees when it comes to this kind of technology? Are we tired of each other? This negative relationship we have with technology will become harder for everyone but especially for minorities such as immigrants. These are the people who have done so much yet are blamed for other people's bad decisions. With this work I want to bring awareness to the treatment that immigrants have had to endure. I want to redirect the finger at technology and its creators. Yes, I understand there are positives to technology, but why go so far as to take away human interaction? Something that we rely on as the human race. I was given an opportunity by my parents to make something for my life. They sacrificed their livelihoods, dreams, desires, and at the end of the day their motherland. I want to spread awareness and inspire those who feel like they're all alone. I want to stand with those who can't do it themselves. It is important to acknowledge those who have taken hard labored jobs. I will say, I am proud to be Mexican and I am proud of my parents for doing so much for us and for getting so little.

Conceptual/ Visual Direction

With this visual essay the core idea is to bring representation and light to the problem that advanced technology is to minorities such as immigrants. It's targeted at a bigger audience

than people who want to learn, it is also for those who fit these shoes in this visual essay there will be an introduction for each of our characters who include Valeria, Nora, Josiah and Emi. Valeria who is Mexican and is seeking a better life; Nora, who has always lived in the city and unfortunately is the product of this corrupt city, she was forced to take in a cybernetic arm at a young age. Josiah is a mechanic and works with cybernetic installments but also works for the government, Emi is full of energy and is part cybernetic; she always wants to find a way to get the new luxurious installment. The four of them will try to find a spot for themselves in the old state of Oregon where this new city appeared. In this state, no more trees grow but somehow rain happens all the time. It is a place surrounded by nothing but false hope. The visuals will entail important events that happened in the story. Such events would be characters meeting other characters and abstract art that displays emotion within Valeria. In these illustrations, I want to bring a grimmer, serious tone but also endearing elements of love and empathy.

Technical plan

Influences

One of my many influences that has helped me be more experimental would-be Molly Mendoza. Some of the features that I've seen within their work are mark making which looks

amazing and also the details from what I see is impressive and very beautiful. This encourages me to be more outside the box and give more depth to what I do.

Martin French is also someone I have looked as reference and the many codes and markings they do is nothing short then amazing. Something that I also see is the more sketch line work that they implement enter their work.

My work

When I first came to PNCA, it was quite hard to find a style I was comfortable with, it seemed like I was trying to follow a crowd and at some point, I questioned my ideas and skills. Earlier this year I found the opportunity to do something different: a more shape-based approach. With this I was more comfortable and found fairly to be a good thing as long as I tried my best and found something new. With the aesthetic of my work, this project both exists in experimental, graphic and shape-based category with mark making, collage, texture, and type on display. I will use these techniques to tell the story. Even so I need to start somewhere (show old art and then new). I think I finally found my voice in a place that was too loud in my head being more confident than ever with the skills backing it up. I can do this project justice and showcase more of my skills as an artist and as a human Being. With the art style that I'm going with I can find my place in the art community.

Conclusion

This visual essay will bring awareness to a problem that exists not only here in the US but also around the world. Minority groups are in danger from advanced technology to overcome that problem we must adapt to our surroundings, and environment. I want to bring a unique style to a story where the unrepresentative people are overcoming life. I want to tell those who feel lonely that they are truly not alone in this world I want to bring a new perspective to those who do not yet understand that struggle.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Alex Zarate is an illustrator born in Salem, Oregon, where he discovered how interested he is in the process of art, storytelling, emotions and the human condition. He now resides in Portland, exploring the complexities and human emotions through mark-marking, pattern, shape, texture and graphic design aesthetics while also bringing real life stories together.

Alex earned his BFA at Pacific Northwest College Of Arts in 2025, majoring in Illustration and has worked through murals, graphic novels, and posters

ABSTRACT

The First Cyber Monarch is a 28 page visual essay that tells the story of Valeria, an immigrant who moves to a new city where technology triumphs. We follow her and through her experiences as an immigrant. A vision of a new life, experiences, emotions, feelings and perspective. With her, we get to meet new people with unique personalities that comes with moving to a new place to help those close to you. Her new life, emotions, feelings, experiences, perspective are what real immigrants feel. We are not aliens, illegals or wetbacks but we are human. We experience the complexities of what it is to be human and even the mistreatment we still experience to this day.

Introduction:

As of now, it is no secret that racism, homophobia, classism has become transparent more so now due to the current election. It is those same people that think technology will be the next big thing in America. AI, Machinery, Machine Learning. All real dangers to creatives, labor jobs and people in general. These are the same labor jobs that provide for those who want an opportunity to have a new life. Where is the empathy for those who have sacrificed so much just for a shot in freedom. With a 28-page visual essay, I will bring awareness, appreciation and an understanding to the immigrant families and workers who had no other choice but to run for a chance in this life. Through the form of an essay, I will use charcoal, watercolor, mark making, collage and line work to display the humanity and real-life stories of immigrant families through the perspective of our fictional character Valeria who moves to a new city where technology triumphs.

The story behind the visual essay is about our fictional character Valeria who is Mexican and is seeking a better life; along with Nora, who has always lived in the city and unfortunately, is the product of this corrupt city, she was forced to take in a cybernetic arm at young age. Josiah is a mechanic and works with cybernetic installments but also works for the government, Emi is full of energy and is part cybernetic; she always wants to find a way to get the new luxurious installment. The four of them will try to find a spot for themselves in the old state of Oregon where this new city appeared. Valeria Who after much hesitation and with the support of her family. She decided to leave Mexico and move to the US. Again, this is in 2050, where

technology has advanced so much that human capability alone will not land you a future here. In this new city called Astoria, Valeria will try to make the most and will try to support her own family from the US. Through this story we see that Valeria gets to experience many different things alongside love, fear, happiness, sadness, loss and at the end acceptance. This visual essay shows the experiences through the lens of an immigrant similar to those now who try to cross the border. In this visual essay, these are moments, emotion, feelings, and at the end these are what makes us human. We experience life alongside it with everyone else.

The reason why I am doing this is because I am tired of seeing people who resemble close to my parents get hurt, murdered, taken away, beaten, and starved. I may not know what they are going through but through my parents, I see the efforts of what my people do to make the best out of the cards they were dealt with.

I am Mexican, my mom and dad are here with me today. They are the reason why I am able to speak about their experiences and many that are similar to theirs. This heavily connects within me. I am exhausted and upset but it compares nothing to what those children, parents and people feel being taken away by ICE. Their pain, emotions, feelings will not be compared. There are still many out there, their voices silenced, their pain in closed doors but their spirits are still not broken. This is bigger than me.

Overview:

The themes within the visual essay were explored in two ways. One being in the perspective of family members that have been through the process of emigration, emigration is the act of leaving one's home country to live somewhere else. The other point of view is the newspaper from University Of Oregon Library where they have 2.5 million pages from Oregon newspaper from 1846 to 2024. That being Media/press.

From the beginning of this project's journey, it was hard. I felt as if I did not have a concrete foundation, and that was more apparent when my midterm review came. One of the many things that was missing was the context. Why did I make this in this certain manner and what is the significance of each piece and how did it tie together as a visual essay. From that midterm, I learned a lot. I needed to voice what I felt and from the perspective of not only my own but of those who have been in the process of coming to the US for a better life. I made context a bigger component within my process. Unfortunately, I had to take a few steps back, fortunately I found the reason for what this was for and for whom.

As the person who took this project to its final stage, I believe the project itself has influenced me more than I ever did for the project. The project itself is more than just a visual essay, there are real world problems. This project has helped me see the context alongside my creative thinking. It has made me think outside of myself. This project has made me closer to my parents. My very parents decided to leave their motherland to go to an unknown country, different

customs, culture, traditions, and they endured through the hardships. As they came here to the US, in a way they had to sacrifice their real dreams in order to build a foundation not only for themselves but also for their children. Me. If I had to say one real reason why this project has changed me then the main reason is in a way I was able to tell the world of my parents' efforts of building a new life and to encourage others to give as much effort as possible and if they are stuck in a bad situation, please hold on to your hopes. We will make noise for you, we will speak for you. In times you couldn't do it yourself, we want to help you.

Spanish translation

Como quien llevó este proyecto a su etapa final, creo que el proyecto en sí me ha influenciado más que yo mismo. Es más que un simple ensayo visual; presenta problemas reales del mundo. Este proyecto me ha ayudado a ver el contexto junto con mi pensamiento creativo. Me ha hecho pensar más allá de mí mismo. Este proyecto me ha acercado a mis padres. Mis padres decidieron dejar su tierra natal para ir a un país desconocido, con costumbres, cultura y tradiciones diferentes, y soportaron las dificultades. Al venir a Estados Unidos, en cierto modo tuvieron que sacrificar sus verdaderos sueños para construir una base no solo para ellos mismos, sino también para sus hijos. Yo. Si tuviera que decir una verdadera razón por la que este proyecto me ha cambiado, la principal es que pude contarle al mundo los esfuerzos de mis padres por construir una nueva vida y animar a otros a esforzarse al máximo. Si se encuentran en una situación difícil, por favor, no pierdan la esperanza. Haremos ruido por ustedes, hablaremos por ustedes. En momentos en los que no puedes hacerlo tú mismo, queremos ayudarte.

Not only has it influenced me, but it has made me think about my audience. That has not changed. I still want this to reach out to my people.

Project Description + Process of making:

- “Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world -Dolores Huerta

The first cyber-Monarch

Page: 4-5 (spread)

To show that Valeria has arrived at a new city and lurking into the new world. Watching a city that never sleeps

Page 6 (individual)

To show a setting where Josiah and Valeria are talking about giving her a cybernetic implant. (both her arms)

Page 7 (individual)

This is in a clinic, and this is where Valeria is getting her implants, in display is death itself. Waiting for our demise. In a way it is also taking away part of our humanity, being part machine means having part of what makes you human get taken away.

Page 8-9 (spread)

In this spread, we are seeing the effects of messing with advanced technology, a more sorrowful realization that technology cannot replace the human touch. Doing such a procedure to your body will come with its consequences, but who's fault really is it? We are seeing from Valeria's perspective that this implant was due to the pressure of her environment.

Page 10 (individual)

First time seeing Nora, who is an acquaintance of Josiah's. From this, we are seeing glimpses of what Valeria thinks of Nora, a strange feeling of comfort and unknown. Here many shapes are taking place. This is what Valeria is trying to do, trying to know who this person is.

Page 11 (individual)

Nora's personality is showing while yes, Nora comes off unknown. They are lonely. A lone wolf among the forest. Once viewed by Valeria, Nora feels seen, feels known. That is why two sides of Nora are on display, one side everyone sees, and the other only Valeria can see.

Page 12-13 (spread)

We go further from what Valeria feels about Nora. Yes, it is the feeling of comfort and the unknown. Deep within Valeria, she sees how beautiful and warm she looks. Nevertheless, here Valeria's heart issues erupting, signifying what crazy things we would do for love.

Page 14 (individual)

We go back into this place called clinic where Valeria is getting her second implant (second arm). Not only that but someone barges in the middle of surgery, it is death again, about to claim another big part of Valeria's humanity. Until a blue aura comes in. It is Emi.

Page 15 (individual)

We deepen the aura that Emi gives. It's rich, high spirit. Emi is an inspiration to Valeria, to live life in the ways we want to. To make life more than what it is. To go through life even if the opposition doesn't want us to.

Page 16-17 (spread)

Fear. Fear is the emotion we all feel when we are uncertain. The feeling of not doing something right, the feeling we can die in such circumstances. The fear we have when technology takes over our lives. This Fear is what loves us, the one that allows us to keep moving forward.

Page 18 (Individual)

Showing what many humans strive for. Love and compassion. In Mexico, there are many ways to show someone love. Within our culture we are very rich spiritually. We try to connect with each other more than just bodies but also within thoughts and feelings.

Page 19 (individual)

This is a more abstract way of showing the connection between lovers. Ones that even after death they will reunite again in the afterlife. Lovers and partners for all eternity. In a world

full of doubt and despair, this connection will never be severed. In love physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Page 20-21 (spread)

There is a small montage on this next spread, here we are focused on the text/statement. The images here are more in the mix of charcoal and collages. There is a grim reality here. Valeria here is realizing the severity of what happens when you go too far with technology, you lose the human side of you. The text goes:

(on Page 20)

“In such corrupt systems, there will always be dead ends. Humans will arrive at these dead ends. Giving us some sort of comfort in the limits that humans have. Even though, we have to realize that we are victims of such corruption. Technology is not our enemy; it is those who are ignorant of the consequences that come with technology.”

(on Page 21)

“My people have been struggling/murdered/tortured/hurt for reasons that are untrue. We have been labelled as aliens, Illegals, lazy, and a threat to people. Our people have strived to work hard, live better, and make this world a better place. Love those who are different than us. We yearn for equality, peace, love, connectivity, and compassion”

Page 22-23 (spread)

Last spread: We are looking at a girl waving the Mexican flag, here she's showing the world how proud we are for being Mexican. Mountains and forest in the background showing an

audience. Telling us that the world needs to hear this. It also means a younger version of my mom. Being in Mexico with a big ambition on wanting to do something great.

(on Page 22)

“Within my culture, there are concepts that are different from others. We do not have to stay within these lines. We can be whoever we want, we can aim to change the world in whichever way we see fit. We are our own person. We are humans”

(on Page 23)

“Technology can be dangerous if we give the responsibility to the wrong people. It can change lives for the worse. If given to the right people, I believe we can all live and not have to survive in this world full of butterflies, one being the first cyber monarch”

In this Essay, there is more than I can hope, this is a story where Immigrants are like anyone else, we are all humans with emotions. We might feel lonely but this book, these images are a sign that our people can be more than we are right now. We are God’s hardest workers. We are human too.

- The scrapped pieces, they didn’t make it but they helped clarify the meaning
- Newspaper: relate to the many themes of what is happening now here
- Talk through how the beginning was hard
- The meaning behind the title “The First Cyber Monarch”

Influence:

Martin French who has always been an inspiration for me. Alongside Molly Mendoza. Their art has helped me visually. It has also helped me shape my own voice. Contextually, Dolores Huerta, an American labor leader and a feminist activist. She was the co-founder of the National Farm Workers Association. She has helped me see how our people are trying to make things better here. To not only give an opportunity to our people but also to those who need it.

The Project In Culture:

I would like to publish this short story, What I was thinking was local bookstores. I believe this project, visual essay, can live anywhere and much closer to my people that need it most. More so, I would love to make some of these pieces into Murals. Something you can see in everyday life and that's because many of these issues happen every day. Now, how does it relate to it today? These issues are very real, and I think now I need to reach out to my people. I also see the themes in this story go over to other short stories. Each immigrant's story is different.

This project I believe will enhance the aspect of a book in my portfolio. One of my many long-term career goals is to be able to publish books. This is just the beginning, and I learned so much about making this project come to life.

Conclusion:

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