



UNDOCREATIVES

Erika Hirugami, MA. MAAB.

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ARTS OF LA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arts professionals work for the betterment of society as they give voice to the difficult questions that communities face across generations. Issues of belonging, acceptance, existence, and quality of life are framed, addressed, and challenged within the creative industries in Los Angeles. As the field-wide artistic community collectively celebrates our ancestries, engages our present, and envisions a better tomorrow, undocumented artists and arts workers in Los Angeles are largely invisible.

This report serves as witness to the undocumented labor force of the LA creative industries, an essential community within the arts sector. Today, there is a widespread lack of awareness of this segment of the population within the arts and culture community, underscoring the need for improved systems and practices to promote the inclusion and vitality of undocumented artists and arts professionals.

The focus of this document is undocreatives. The term refers to undocumented members of the creative industries (artists and arts professionals). Further key terminology is defined in the Appendices. This analysis utilizes testimonios to highlight their lived experiences, the systemic challenges they face, and the support that they need from the arts sector. As the first analysis of its kind, this study acknowledges the significance of creating space for undocumented arts professionals within larger studies, dialogues, and practices surrounding cultural equity and inclusion.



THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE TESTIMONIOS GATHERED

Building on the premise that all residents of LA County are entitled to representation within and access to the arts and culture, the testimonios illustrate key themes in undocreatives' personal and professional lives, the systemic challenges they face in an inherently unjust and exclusionary environment, and the support that they need.

- **Education:** Undocumented artists operate within creative industries that value academic degrees, certifications, and key coursework, but academia establishes funding and documentation barriers that undermine undocreatives' ability to participate in the educational pipeline and graduate. Internships and job training are often privileged pathways to artistic careers, whereas undocumented artists cannot afford to gift their labor.
- **Careers:** Undocreatives lack access to stable employment opportunities and sustainable career paths while sometimes experiencing unfair and unsafe working conditions and labor practices. They face additional barriers to advancing their careers by their inability to travel to promote their work. They also lack citizenship documentation, which is required by institutions to employ these artists or display and even sell their artwork.
- **Funding:** Undocumented artists face multiple barriers in accessing funding opportunities offered through government or private grants and other means of financial support.
- **Vulnerability & Trauma:** Undocreatives struggle with depression, anxiety, and stress as they navigate an unjust immigration system, with threats of deportation, constant monitoring, visa sponsorship/processing challenges, and ever-present documentation barriers, amid a social climate that marginalizes and ignores them.
- **Tokenism:** Undocumented artists face demands from the public and the art sector to perform undocumentedness while personally feeling fetishized, tokenized, and othered in the name of cultural competency and sanitized entertainment.
- **Contributions:** While unable to participate in many of the social opportunities afforded to others, undocreatives enrich society with their art and make significant contributions to the country.



SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Highlighting the lived experiences of undocreatives raises collective consciousness and simultaneously elicits actionable transformation from within the field to serve individuals in the undoc+ spectrum in equitable and just ways. It is critical to learn from the approaches of government agencies, arts organizations, and arts nonprofits (some of which are examined below) to implement initiatives that include or are specifically tailored for undocreatives.

Drawing inspiration from these initiatives and the following testimonios makes it possible to make actionable recommendations for arts organizations, agencies, educational institutions, funders, advocates, artists, and leaders to increase their knowledge around undocumentedness to produce shifts in policies and practices. Fundamentally, there is a need for increased prioritization of the undocumented community through inclusion, thought leadership, and advocacy.

BACKGROUND

UNDOCREATIVES AND CITIZENSHIP

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the history of immigration to the United States, which has created a regulatory and capitalist-driven system of oppression that depends on undocumented labor while simultaneously marginalizing and exploiting undocumented workers. Society dichotomizes undocumentedness to citizenship. “American common sense communicates that there are some who are legal and others who are illegal. This distinction emphasizes a duality that easily equates legality with goodness and civility and illegality with evil and deviance.”^[1] However, undocumentedness is much more complicated than this oversimplified dichotomy. In the words of Aviva Chomsky,

It seems right and natural to us that people should be divided by citizenship and documented into different categories with differential rights. We assume that the world is naturally divided into countries and that every human being somehow belongs in one country or another. People are supposed to stay in the country that they were born in unless they can get special permission to enter another. There is nothing natural about this state of affairs. Countries, sovereignty, citizenship, and laws are all social constructions: abstractions invented by humans.^[2]

This type of logic allows many institutions to disregard the livelihoods of millions of people currently residing away from their ancestral place of origin. Living undocumented, however, is marked by a series of legal constraints created by nation-states to benefit capitalist systems. Creating a state of vulnerability for large chunks of the population allows countries around the globe to benefit from migrant labor while disregarding sustainability for immigrants. Furthermore, Ariella Azoulay argues that for the governing power, citizens can be equal amongst themselves but not equal vis-à-vis others governed by that same power.^[3] Therefore, citizens who are governed together with noncitizens are governed differently and cannot be equal under the law. Thus, citizens cannot be granted equality amongst their peers if they are governed amongst others who are not governed as equal. This makes the social construction of citizenship, in juxtaposition to undocumentedness, detrimental to the members of the undocumented community and the citizenry at large. In governing the undocumented community with unequal rights, citizens fail to achieve liberty and justice for all.

This dual characterization vastly oversimplifies and prejudices what is an extraordinarily complex and multi-faceted issue. Race Forward’s Butterfly Lab for Immigrant Narrative Strategy reported on research demonstrating that “though a plurality of Americans hold pro-immigrant values, they feel very conflicted about immigration... [t]here is a broad hunger for a future that is abundant and free and that embraces immigrants in the United States standing in our way - and felt across the ideological spectrum - are fears of scarcity, chaos, and a lack of safety.”^[4] Moreover, society conditions us (by definition) to overlook the needs and aspirations of marginalized groups. Los Angeles County’s arts and culture sector, however, is at the beginning of its journey incorporating undocumented artists into its inclusivity work.



LA COUNTY'S CULTURAL POLICY STRATEGIC PLAN

Important groundwork has already been laid for this journey. On September 30, 2022, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted its groundbreaking Cultural Policy Strategic Plan. The Plan's introduction describes the County's evolution in increasingly centering equity in access to arts and culture **for all residents**.

Los Angeles County is recognized as an arts leader and has invested meaningfully in arts and culture for more than a century, including through its County-owned cultural venues, grants for community-based organizations, and civic artworks. However, there is more work to be done to advance cultural and racial equity, and to increase access to the arts and its many benefits **for all residents**. With the progress of the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative and the creation of the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, a shift in the way Los Angeles County invests in arts and culture is underway, with a focus on providing more support for the region's diverse cultural ecosystem and community-based arts organizations and a deepening understanding of the power of the arts as a strategy for public policy, positive social change, anti-racism, and equitable outcomes.^[5]

The Plan's definition of cultural equity specifically calls out citizenship status in its catalogue of communities traditionally underrepresented in the arts.

The Cultural Policy defines cultural equity as the values, policies, and practices that ensure all people— including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented or marginalized based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of policy and the fair and equitable distribution of cultural resources. Cultural equity utilizes a strengths-based approach such that diverse forms of artistic and cultural expression are represented and supported, and existing cultural organizations, artists, communities, and artistic practices are valued.^[6]

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study converges primary research in the form of testimonios and autoethnography (a research method grounded in self-reflection as a means for analyzing larger issues) with secondary research in the form of data analysis, literature review, and an examination of the landscape of the relevant practices in the field. As per Chicana scholars Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga, and Judith Flores Carmona - a “testimonio challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance.”^[7]

Through the testimonios of undocreatives, this paper situates their collective experience in direct relation to the arts and cultural fields. “Testimonio is and continues to be, an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In connecting individual experiences with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change.”^[8] This approach allows the paper to distill essential knowledge shared by undocreatives and speaks to areas of opportunity for advancing cultural practices and policies in the field.

The testimonios are anonymous to safeguard the livelihood and privacy of each participant. For transparency, it should be noted that a mindful approach toward discussing undocumentedness anonymously is a conscious decision made with the individuals whose stories occupy these pages to refute publicly signaling legal status. Pseudonyms chosen from the annals of art history are used as a nod to immigrants who thrived in this field (Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Louise Bourgeois, Jonas Mekas, Lucian Freud, and Tina Modotti).



TESTIMONIOS

SALVADOR DALI

**"I RISK DEPORTATION
TO PORTRAY MY THOUGHTS ON CANVAS."**

The historical Dali was an artist born in Spain in 1904; he immigrated to France and the United States during his lifetime. All three nations celebrate his artistic genius and aesthetic accomplishments today.

The Salvador of this study worked directly under one of the great masters of his country of origin after studying in one of the best art schools in his nation. He immigrated during his twenties with the single goal of having a better artistic practice. Today, Salvador has a wife, children, and grandchildren (most of whom are citizens). He has called LA home for nearly four decades. Visual art experts consider his creations as compelling as the greatest masters of his home country. However, Salvador lives undocumented in Los Angeles and has not held a retrospective at any major museum, nor does he have gallery representation. Most Angelenos are not familiar with his masterpieces, although he is a prolific artist of extraordinary talent, and his work is of the highest aesthetic quality. His artwork is not traded in the blue-chip art market, and he does have sustainability from his artistic practice.

Every night in his studio, this Salvador creates countless masterpieces that bear his signature but seldom see the light of day. By day he works in a local gallery, where a non-BIPOC gallery director exploits his undocumented status constantly. Yet, Salvador goes to work every day and thinks himself lucky to work in the arts industry, doing what he loves for a living. This Salvador creates artwork under the guidance of blue-chip artists in Los Angeles. He creates in anonymity; after all, it is common for more established artists to outsource their work in the visual arts. A recent project of Salvador's making

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After his arrival, Salvador was not a part of the arts sector for over a decade. Instead, he worked near Sacramento in agriculture, picking fruit for a living. Years passed, and after landing in Los Angeles, Salvador worked a series of smaller blue-collar jobs before working in the art world. Through acquaintances, he met the gallery director he works for today. This gallery director pays him below minimum wage and has not given him a raise in years. During Covid, the gallery closed for months, and Salvador had no income from his day job, nor was he fired or kept apprised of the gallery's reopening plans. With the hope for a better future for his children, and the promise to thrive in the art world, Salvador agreed to work for this gallery—under the table. One of the promises of this position was that his employer would help him secure a permanent residency.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, better known as IRCA, implemented employer sanctions against those knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants.^[9] Salvador arrived around the same time that the IRCA sanctions began. Salvador had to sacrifice earning a living wage to gain access to the art world.

Nearly thirty years have passed, and only a single mention of sponsoring Salvador's residency request has emerged from the Gallery Director. Today, decades after living in this country, Salvador is no closer to gaining a residency card or social security number. Countless visits to lawyers have left Salvador with zero to no hope of ever naturalizing. Despite being paid under the table, Salvador pays his taxes every year, volunteers at his local church, and mentors younger artists. He has not once received a grant for his practice, although he has made artwork in Los Angeles for nearly four decades.

Countless exhibitions and news articles aside, Salvador still acknowledges every day that there is an inherent risk in being an artist in Los Angeles. "One day, someone will see my work, learn that I am undocumented, and have me deported. That is a risk I have to take every day for the privilege to portray my thoughts on canvas."^[10] A few months ago, Salvador's mother passed away in his home country, and he could not attend the funeral. Recently, Salvador visited yet another lawyer who informed him that due to the current political climate and most recent bureaucratic immigration rules, he has very little chance of obtaining a permanent residency. Even if Salvador could apply for permanent residence today, naturalizing can take over two decades to process a single case; two decades from today, Salvador will be in his early nineties.





PABLO PICASSO

“I DON’T NEED TO ADVERTISE THAT I AM UNDOCUMENTED.”


The historical Picasso was born in Málaga, Spain, and his earliest works date to his teenage years. The first stop in his migratory journey was in France at the age of twenty. By his thirties, he would find a home in Italy and later return to Spain. Picasso enjoys global recognition today, and his artwork graces significant museums worldwide.

The Pablo of this study left his home country when his pregnant wife became bedridden, and he needed to subsidize their medical bills. He received an MFA (Master in Fine Arts) in his home country, and his work was already gaining popularity in his hometown and Europe before he migrated to the United States. Lacking a visa, the Pablo of this study had to hire a coyote to smuggle him across the Mexico/United States border. After various smugglers tried and failed, it took Pablo weeks to secure passage into the United States. The coyote Pablo entrusted with his life had made a prior deal with the immigration officer stationed east of San Isidro; instead of granting him safe passage, the immigration officer assaulted Pablo and the other people being smuggled alongside him. “Never have I felt such fear and anxiety in my life before that event.”^[11] Despite being a professional MFA graduate thriving in

publishing back in his home country, Los Angeles welcomed Pablo with nearly a decade of menial labor. “Some days, I would knock door by door alongside shop-filled avenues, asking for a few hours of labor while speaking very broken English.”^[12] For over thirteen years, the Pablo of this study made only nine dollars an hour and could barely afford to sustain his growing family. For thirteen years after migrating Pablo did not pick up a paintbrush, nor could he afford to purchase an easel.

“Never have I felt such fear and anxiety in my life before that event.”

Although Pablo’s work is recognized as having compelling aesthetic prowess in many countries across the globe, such as Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Europe, his work has not been exhibited in any significant way in Los Angeles, the city he now calls home. In his own words, “my work can travel, but I can’t go anywhere myself.”^[13] Pablo’s inability to travel has limited his opportunities to develop a global reputation, which has simi-



larly limited his capacity to be recognized locally.

One of Pablo's professional goals upon migrating to the United States was to position his work in the Los Angeles art scene. He fears that applying for grants to support his art and enable exhibitions will threaten his ability to become a citizen someday. Pablo has paid taxes for years. Not only is he currently a financially responsible member of this community, but he is also saving for his children's college education. He knows how important education truly is and yearns for nothing more than his children graduating without student loans.

Last we spoke, Pablo conveyed extreme anxiety over the fact that he was asked by Citizenship and Immigration Services to voluntarily leave the United States to request residency from his home country; this is customary for those in the latest stages of naturalization. He has since left his home in the United States, leaving behind a wife and two daughters, with zero certainty that he will return to his home or ever again see his family. Last week Pablo had to come out as undocumented to his co-workers and friends. After spending decades hiding his undocumented status from those close to him, he had to expose himself to dozens of people hoping that he would return from his home country as a permanent resident of the United States.

Pablo, a proud man who constantly mentioned, "I don't need to advertise that I am undocumented,"^[4] had to inform countless individuals about his undocumented status to explain why, without a plan to return, he was leaving this country, his home, his job, and his

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children. A few days from today, he will meet a USCIS agent who will ask him a series of questions about his undocumented journey and, in minutes, that agent will change Pablo's life forever, whether it will be a positive change, or a negative outcome remains to be known until after Pablo's naturalization interview. A positive result means that a record of his living in the United States undocumented will be recorded on his permanent file, that a social security number will be issued with his name on it, and that he will be stopped at the airport every time he returns from his home country, where he will be questioned for hours. He might come home to his family and friends and continue to return to be an essential part of the arts sector, or he might be asked to stay in his home country for decades, never to return to his family again fully.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

“HAPPINESS IS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.”

Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911 and immigrated to the United States in 1938 at twenty-seven.^[15] Bourgeois' career was so celebrated in the United States that she represented the Venice Biennale of 1993.^[16]

Our Louise was sent to the United States at fourteen. She was not allowed a formal education either by her parents back home or the people who took her in upon arrival. Instead, the Louise of this study had to work daily doing small tasks around the house such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of small children both in her home country and upon arrival to the United States. Louise was the child of a negligent single mother who could not provide her with an education. Instead, she insisted that Louise work from a young age to help financially sustain her family. The Louise of this analysis crossed the border utilizing her cousin's birth certificate (back when a passport was unnecessary for children to cross the border). Three years passed since this Louise migrated to the United States before she was allowed to attend school. For three years, she moved from home to home and slept on the couch of whoever would take her in exchange for domestic labor.

Years after Louise's arrival, her brother (back home) was in a car accident that left him unable to fend for himself. Louise thus began to work twelve hours a day to send money to care for her brother. She often walked to and from work for forty-five minutes, could not provide for her family, nor had enough money for rent. Louise concluded her education much later; she obtained a Certified Nursing Assistant certificate in restorative care and passed her ESL qualifications to work in an assisted living facility. It was only after her license expired that she realized she was undocumented. “A kind woman in the social security office told me my social was fake and that it was a felony for me to use it; she said never to show it to anyone again.”

Today, Louise has three children and understands she cannot work in this country or receive any benefits because of her undocumented status. As a mother and a caretaker, she became an artist for its therapeutic qualities. “I found clay.” She became a sculptor and a potter, “I found something that my hands could do that no one could take away from me.” Louise began to take ceramics courses at a local museum; within weeks, the staff at the museum noticed her aesthetic skills



and offered her a teaching artist position. She refused for months with hopes of not outing her undocumented status. Upon learning of her inability to work legally, Louise asked if the museum could pay her with a grant instead of a salary, only to find out that Louise could not take grant money because she lacked the documentation necessary to receive

“I found clay, something that my hands could do that no one could take away from me.”

funds from a non-profit organization and be taxed. As a last resort, she thought to have the museum sell her work in their museum store, and once again, the museum was unable to provide her with this service. Louise today cannot even open an Etsy shop account; she cannot apply for a seller's permit, teach, or work in the arts sector. Her work has been purchased under the table by many of the people on the board of directors of that museum, but there's too much red tape required for Louise to exhibit her artwork. Even loaning a piece to the museum would require her to fill out paperwork that she cannot complete.^[17]

For now, the museum administrative staff parade Louise in front of donors to gain funds she helps bring into the organization but cannot access herself. Her pieces are beautiful, and at best, she can get them to farmers' markets, where people need to pay her in cash for her to be able to place her work in the market. Museums can't work with her; galleries cannot represent her, so Louise's talent goes largely unnoticed by the arts sector. Her nephew helps her bring her wares to the market, only to find that patrons assume he has made them. The patrons walk away upon speaking to the artist, murmuring in beautiful, broken English. “I can't make a sale if I have to tell anyone that I'm undocumented.”^[18] Unable to make a living from her work, Louise is left volunteering to do clay demonstrations at various schools. “Art supplies are expensive, and I still have to save whatever little money I can so that I can bring this to the kids without getting in trouble.”^[19] Louise has lived in the United States for over three decades and has three children.^[20] Although her undocumented status disables her from making a living or even a small income from her art, she is still an essential part of the arts sector. As a teaching artist, she is responsible for disseminating knowledge to the next generations and hopes to transmit to the next generations that “happiness is at your fingertips.”^[21]



JONAS MEKAS

“...AS IF IT WERE A NOVELTY TO EXIST.”

Mekas was born in Lithuania in 1922 and is today considered by some to be the godfather of American avant-garde cinema.^[22] Mekas migrated to the United States at the age of twenty-seven. During his life, he won the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award.

The Jonas of this analysis migrated to the United States with their migrant working parents when they were twelve years old. Like many immigrant children, until the age of seventeen, the Jonas of this study didn't truly understand their undocumented status, nor did they possess the language to articulate it. Jonas is the only participant in this study to be publicly and professionally out as undocumented. For them, grants are exhausting and triggering, and often serve as a reminder of their undocumented status. As filmmakers, they are expected to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for each project. Yet often, film grants are solely for citizens or permanent residents, making films by undocumented filmmakers nearly impossible to produce.

Jonas has been openly creating community and visibility for undocumentedness in the past years, with a community thought to be invisible alongside other undocreatives who openly acknowledge being undocumented and unafraid. Being openly undocumented commonly equates to becoming a living advocate for undocumented matters almost exclusively. Creating artwork that serves as an aesthetic bridge between the undocumented community and the host society requires that each undocreative re-traumatize themselves at work every single day for the pleasures of the general populous. For Jonas, matters of representation are increasingly important but often at the expense of re-traumatizing themselves to produce such artistic projects. Trauma shapes every undocreative's positionality when asked to exhibit the aesthetics of undocumented; they must channel that pain and create beauty from it. Jonas explained how stifling it is for them to be considered “brave” or to be infantilized and patronized for being openly undocumented “as if it were a novelty to exist.”^[23]





LUCIAN FREUD

**“IT TOOK ME MORE THAN A DECADE
TO SHOW UP AUTHENTICALLY.”**

The Lucian Freud of Art History was born in Germany to Jewish parents and migrated to England to escape the Nazi Regime.^[24] His aesthetic creations have been the center of hundreds of exhibitions worldwide, dozens of publications, and even a movie.

The Lucian of this analysis is amongst the few participants to be semi-legally protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy which took effect in 2012.^[25] Lucian self-identifies as undocumented because his non-permanent legal status is perpetually in flux as DACA delineates no path to citizenship. Like most child immigrants, Lucian was blissfully unaware of his undocumented status during most of his childhood, only to learn about it during his earliest college days.

While navigating school, Lucian learned from his parents that he didn't qualify for financial aid to attend college. Lucian knew he was hiding something from that point forth, but he didn't truly understand what or why. While at community college, he applied for work-study to help supplement his income, and that is when Lucian truly realized he was undocumented. Grad school is almost entirely out of the question as an undocumented member of the community, and at that time of Lucian's journey, DACA was still not in effect. Whereas his contemporaries traveled for education and applied to Graduate schools all across the globe, Lucian didn't even try. During his college days, he worked nights to be able to afford his classes. Cleaning corporate buildings all night, resting very little during the day, and sleeping in his car were just some of Lucian's daily activities during his community college experience. Lucian's socio-economic status has never been that of his peers, as his undocumented status truncated his educational attainment. Therefore, he could not obtain an occupational specialization in the form of an MFA (Master in Fine Art).

In Lucian's own words, “it took me more than a decade to show up in a truly authentic way.”^[26] Lucian was unable to further professionalize and receive an MFA, which is the terminal degree in his field. Many arts organizations have turned him away because his curriculum does not include internships, a graduate degree, or an extensive list of exhibitions, none of which he could fund.

TINA MODOTTI

**“I WAS TOO EXHAUSTED TO BE UNDOCUMENTED
AND TOO EXHAUSTED TO BE AN ARTIST.”**

Modotti was an actress, a model, a photographer, and a political activist. Born in Italy, Modotti migrated to the United States at the age of sixteen; at twenty-seven, she migrated to Mexico and spent the latest stages of her life in Moscow.^[27]

The Tina of this analysis arrived when she was five years old. She has lived in Los Angeles for nearly three decades now, and just a few years ago, she learned the truth of her migratory journey. Her dad migrated first; her mom followed with her children. Lacking proper documentation for his children, Tina’s dad picked them up from Tijuana in the middle of the night, and the children (Tina and her siblings) crossed the border pretending to sleep. The customs enforcement agent gave them a safe passage to avoid disturbing the children sleeping. “That was the first time my dad smuggled anyone; my dad became a coyote after that... one of the good ones.”^[28]

Tina is an exceptionally talented art professional with a film and theater background. She is an arts administrator who learned of her undocumented status in high school. Like Lucian, Tina did not qualify to attend a university nor enjoy financial support from her parents. Tina

became depressed after realizing that her career life goals disappeared for being undocumented. A life of hiding, and perpetually performing citizenship, soon followed as her political activist path emerged. At school, she took on the extra labor of educating academic advisors and financial aid officers that were assigned to help her get into college; she had to explain time and time again why she was unable to qualify based on lacking proper documentation. “I honestly thought multiple times that I was the only undocumented student in the country.”^[29] She could not socialize with her peers who would head to Tijuana for the day, often making excuses to hide her inability to travel. Her romantic life also suffered at the expense of being undocumented, as she would often be invited to clubs and gatherings that would require

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her to foreground her lack of identification. She thus withdrew from partaking in many social outings with her peers.

During college, she would save for months at a time to be able to pay for her classes, “I would show up to pay my tuition with coins; I was so embarrassed. I remember telling my mom not to pay with coins at the grocery store, and I became her... no shame, I paid for my education myself.”^[30]

At every level, any number of administrators would encourage her to apply for the benefits of an international student; she again had to educate everyone on undocumentedness. It took a lot of her energy to educate the administrative staff of her college, and it took an emotional and psychological toll on her mental health. Years later, after a series of academic disappointments, she geared to leave it all behind to return home and have a chance at a future. As DACA began to gain traction, Tina decided to postpone leaving and channel all her energies into getting DACA passed.

Her days as an activist, her background in film, and her new DACA protection encouraged her to try a career in film. For many years Tina has been working on a movie about undocumentedness. Along that path, she realized that the industry grants every opportunity to non-BIPOC filmmakers with projects about undocumentedness but not to undocumented filmmakers. Her project is currently on hold. “I was too exhausted to be undocu-

mented and too exhausted to be an artist.”^[31] Frustrated, she tried her luck with acting, landing a role in a small film about border issues. She was asked to play the role of an undocumented woman currently in a detention center. “I thought they knew about my status; I was so scared to be found out.”^[32] For the first time in her life, the arts had made a space for her positionality to be displayed, and that positionality was to be detained. Tina found this experience ironic and quickly left acting.

Having tried film, acting, and other interdisciplinary approaches to being an artist, Tina is an arts administrator today. Tina had to educate many HR managers at various arts organizations on her protected status upon entering new working environments. She has not left art behind. Instead, today Tina utilizes her talents to aid other arts professionals in creating projects. In her position as an arts administrator, she aggressively advocates for undocumented projects, often at the expense of her own safety. Not long ago, one of her co-workers threatened her with deportation for supporting other undocreatives. To this day, Tina only comes out as undocumented sporadically, as most people may utilize this against her. Tina is well aware of the triple labor she must endure every day to hide her internalized status, perform citizenship, and educate arts professionals about undocumentedness while seeking recourses for the undocumented community.



THEMES FROM UNDOCREATIVES' LIVED EXPERIENCES

The lived experiences of the individual testimonios exemplify the larger themes that epitomize the lives of undocreatives in Los Angeles.

EDUCATION

Undocumented artists operate within creative industries that value academic degrees, certifications, and key coursework, but academic systems and institutions establish funding and documentation barriers that undermine undocreatives' ability to attend school and graduate. Academia is a minefield for undocumented individuals who often learn of their undocumented status when seeking a college education, as Jonas, Lucian, and Tina all did. Like Lucian, many individual artists realize that certain undergraduate and graduate degrees are out of reach because of documentation requirements, financial challenges, or their inability to travel to institutions or programs. For example, attending a Community College costs a California resident \$46 a unit, whereas an undocumented student must pay \$328 for that same unit of education.^[33] Moreover, there is little support for overcoming these barriers. Undocreatives like Tina find themselves taking on the labor of educating advisors and financial aid officers about the documentation and financial hurdles that they face.

Unpaid (or underpaid) internships and job training are often privileged pathways to artistic careers, as undocumented artists cannot afford to gift labor. Occupational specialization in the form of free labor is one of the founding principles of the arts sector. Internships and job training are often tied to demands with which undocreatives cannot comply. They lack access to family and third-party resources and often work menial jobs – unrelated to the arts – to pay for schooling. A paid education, plus sustainable funding for supplies and living expenses, and the time to gift free labor are seldom available to undocreatives.

Arts nonprofits, in turn, will not hire artists like Lucian who do not have the academic degrees, artistic fellowships, and extensive resumes like those of other artists, notwithstanding those degrees are not synonymous with ability, talent, or passion. As Lucian discovered, educational achievement is just one component of social scientists' assessment of immigrant assimilation. These factors include socio-economic status, educational attainment, occupational specialization, language assimilation, and intermarriage. It takes a period of about twenty years for immigrants to catch up to native-born people with relatively equal human capital.^[34]

CAREERS

Undocreatives lack access to stable employment opportunities and sustainable career paths while experiencing unfair and unsafe working conditions and labor practices. Despite having extraordinary artistic skills, artists like Louise cannot be employed and paid by a museum through salaries or grants. Undocreatives seldom benefit from representation by agents or galleries, as Louise and Salvador experienced. Artists are often beholden to gallery owners who may hire them, but the compensation may be under the table and below minimum wage, as is Salvador's experience. When artists like Salvador do receive a gallery show, there is little opportunity to build a reputation as their art may be exhibited anonymously due to liability and legal concerns. Alternatively, if someone sees their art and learns of the artist's undocumented status, deportation becomes a real and ever-present fear.

It is nearly impossible for undocumented artists to position and promote their work in the contemporary art world because of their inability to travel. Today's art sector often demands that artists have international projects in multiple destinations. And even if an undocreative's art travels – as has Pablo's – a Los Angeles reputation that fully reflects his international stature is elusive. Undocreatives like Tina can create a career in arts administration; it is a constant struggle to educate employers about their status, available employment options, and to work alongside coworkers who may bully or take advantage of an undocreative because of their tenuous status.

FUNDING

Undocumented artists face multiple barriers in accessing funding opportunities offered through government grants, private donations, foundation grants, and other means of financial support. As explored in the previous section, many undocreatives need greater philanthropic support than other artists because they earn less as artists due to the career challenges they face. Many of the artists surveyed worked in menial jobs for decades, barely able to support their families. Yet, these artists have the same need for resources to fund artistic exhibitions, projects, training, studies, and the acquisition of art materials. For an undocreative, paying for a project out of pocket often means years of saving money to complete a single project.

Despite the greater need, undocreatives find that very little grant money is available to them because of their undocumented status. Salvador's experience is illustrative, as he has created art in Los Angeles for nearly four decades without receiving a single grant to support his practice. Jonas and Tina cannot access grants for expensive film projects because the funds are reserved for citizens or permanent residents. The lack of funding channels makes it almost impossible to produce films by undocumented filmmakers or create other large-scale artistic projects.

Artists like Pablo and Jonas are also wary of applying for funding assistance because they fear their undocumented status will be uncovered. Asking for help is often conflated with deportation for undocreatives. They also think that reliance on support from others will diminish their ability to naturalize, as they believe that they will need to prove that they are not a financial burden on the country to gain citizenship. “Applicants often worry that the fact that they have received public benefits (financial or other assistance from a government agency) will hurt their application for naturalization. In particular, they worry that needing government aid or support will cast doubt on their showing of good moral character.”^[35]

Given the documentation and structural barriers to financial support and the innate fear of asking for help in interacting with government or institutional funders, undocreatives have little access to financial resources that could support their art or their lives.

VULNERABILITY AND TRAUMA

Undocreatives struggle with depression, anxiety, and stress as they navigate an unjust immigration system, with its threats of deportation, constant monitoring, visa sponsorship/processing challenges, and ever-present documentation barriers, amid a social climate that marginalizes or ignores their needs. They must also endure the effects of racial discrimination, transphobia and homophobia, white supremacy, neurotypical demands, patriarchy, and exploitative capitalism.

This anti-immigrant sentiment, excessive surveillance, and an uncertain and unjust system establish fear as central to undocumentedness. This interferes with everyday activities and leads to feelings of hopelessness. The vulnerability of undocumentedness often translates to undocreatives bearing physical and emotional distress of menial jobs, substandard work conditions, long hours, poor wages, and – like Tina – threats of exposure by coworkers.

The anguish of leaving family behind in the United States is an actual part of the naturalization process since undocreatives like Pablo must leave the United States to request residency from their home countries with zero certainty they will ever return to be reunited with their loved ones. Limitations on travel further exacerbate the pain of family separation, as undocreatives like Salvador miss key family moments such as a new birth or the death of a parent in another country. For others, the fear of deportation is so great they avoid leaving their homes altogether.^[36]

Undocumented artists bear additional burdens beyond those of other undocumented workers. For the most part, artists navigate their careers on their own, which is particularly true of undocreatives who arts institutions seldom employ. Practicing or displaying their art requires that the individual negotiate with the gatekeeper institution in an inherently unequal power relationship. Being undocumented exacer-

bates this imbalance. Even artists like Jonas, who bravely applies to various funders, described being exhausted and triggered by the grantmaking process. As Tina has done, knowledgeable undocreatives bear the extra emotional labor of educating administrators in academia or art institutions. Moreover, the key to a successful art career is building a reputation, but performing or displaying one's art in public carries an inherent risk of exposure and deportation. Artists like Salvador and Pablo experience daily fear that their art will be recognized and their status uncovered.

Concealing undocumentedness and rendering themselves invisible becomes an unspoken yet ever-present double labor placed upon undocreatives. Artists like Tina and Lucian describe the effort of leading a double life where they hide away their immigrant trauma. This is the perfect mixture of circumstances to brew imposter syndrome among the undocumented community in the arts sector. In the words of Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, "we were young but could already turn off the parts of ourselves that hurt, like a light switch."^[37] Yet, amongst ourselves, we know.^[38]

As further explored below, when undocreatives are invited into an artistic space or project, trauma shapes their experience when they – like Jonas – are asked to display undocumentedness. Freedom is a privilege seldom enjoyed by undocreatives: freedom to create, freedom from fear, freedom of expression, and freedom to belong.

TOKENISM

Undocreatives face additional demands from the public and the art sector to perform undocumentedness out loud, while being fetishized, tokenized, and othered in the name of sanitized entertainment.

Being openly undocumented equates to becoming a living advocate for undocumented matters almost exclusively. Creating artwork that serves as an aesthetic bridge between the undocumented community and their host society requires that each undocreative regularly re-traumatize themselves for the pleasure of the general populous or the gain of institutions.

The arts sector plays an important role in creating narratives of undocumentedness, and representation by undocreatives in the sector is essential. However, in the words of Yosimar Reyes, **"I want to exist without having to be public about where my spirit aches."**^[39] Promoting cultural competency by publicly acknowledging undocumentedness often equates to tokenizing undocumented pain and its fetishization. Louise's testimonio reinforces how members of the arts sector fetishize undocumentedness, whereas Tina's testimonio serves as an example of the constant demands to perform undocumentedness. Jonas explained: it is stifling to be considered "brave" or to be infantilized and patronized for being openly undocumented "as if it were a novelty to exist." Undocumented narratives in the creative industries are thus manip-

ulated and exploited while audiences seek a sanitized version of matters pertaining to the undocumented spectrum for entertainment value.

Depersonalization is inherent in tokenism. In my second master thesis, which is also the first academic exploration of its kind to discuss the convergence of undocumentedness and aesthetics, entitled “Political Art Action: The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness,” I argued that:

“The aesthetics of undocumentedness explores the bureaucratic depersonalization that is seldom presented aesthetically and seeks to delineate its present instances. It centers on the aesthetic practices of immigrant artists as they are often disregarded from the art history canon and draws upon their creations to enact a dialogue centering their positionality as foreigners in countries that subjugate their communities for economic gain. It presents itself within the works of countless migrant artists who question immigration by aesthetically exploring the bureaucratization of personhood.

The aesthetics of undocumentedness is thus activated when immigrant artists produce artworks centering on migratory concerns such as migration itself, border crossing, residency requesting, naturalization, citizenship granting, imminent deportation, and undocumentedness, as well as labor exploitation outside one’s country of origin. However, the aesthetics of undocumentedness cannot speak for a monolithic migratory experience, as no two immigrants share one same journey.”^[40]

CONTRIBUTIONS

While unable to participate in many of the social opportunities afforded to others, undocreatives enrich society with their art, make significant contributions to this host country, and for the purposes of this analysis, specifically the Los Angeles arts ecosystem.

They volunteer to generate knowledge, whether it is by teaching students (as Louise does), mentoring artists (as Salvador does), or educating employers about undocumentedness (as Tina does). They are caretakers, parents saving for their children’s education, and church volunteers. They are advocates and activists, like Jonas, who are creating community and visibility for individuals in the undoc+ spectrum and undocumented diaspora. Others have chosen vocations like Tina has, which enable them to aid other undocreatives and advocate for undocumented projects while seeking resources for the undoc+ community.

Undocumented immigrants contribute substantial financial benefits to the county

while receiving less in return. In the recent report “Essential but Disposable: Undocumented Workers and Their Mixed-Status Families. Modeling COVID-19 Economic Impacts and Government Relief Policies by Race and Immigration Status in Los Angeles County, California, and the United States” published by the UCLA North American Integration and Development Center, one of the key findings was that undocumented workers are massive contributors to the economy. California’s undocumented workers lead the nation in contributions to GDP, employment, and taxes.^[41] Like the undocumented creatives discussed in this analysis, millions of undocumented individuals are why Los Angeles County and the United States thrive financially.

In spite of ever-present obstacles, each member of the undocumented community who participated in this analysis exhibits an enormous amount of resilience, empowerment, agency, self-determination, and a never-ending drive that keeps them moving forward in this field. They are to be celebrated and emulated.

Being undocumented is not political; it’s not physical,
it’s a condition created to keep us from smiling.
But look at us thriving!^[42]



RESOURCES FOR UNDOCREATIVES

Undocreatives lack access to many resources and opportunities and are often not identified in inclusion-driven efforts, especially when compared to other creative industry workers. It is important to highlight where opportunities exist to address these inequities. While the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture 2022 Countywide Cultural Policy Strategic Plan does not itemize initiatives by a specific type of community (for example, individuals in the undoc+ spectrum), it states that the County's Cultural Policy "provides direction for Los Angeles County and its departments to ensure that **every resident** of the County has meaningful access to arts and culture."^[43] Every resident includes the approximately 3,500,000 immigrants and 800,000 undocumented people living in LA County noted above. As the County's Cultural Plan is implemented, it should consider and address the unique issues of immigrants and undocreatives in realizing the "vision of the Board of Supervisors to ensure that all County residents have equitable access to the arts."^[44]

A handful of arts organizations in California are already making space for undocreatives, although most are not based in Los Angeles County. These efforts are illustrative of the undocreative future across the arts sector.

EMPLOYMENT

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

In July 2022, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to waive citizenship requirements for Los Angeles County government employment, except in positions where being a U.S. citizen is required by state and federal law. "Los Angeles County is a community of immigrants from each corner of the world," said Chair Hilda Solis, and "while our County-government workforce reflects the community it represents, there is room for improvement. This motion seeks to make clear that the County, as one of the largest employers in the region, strives to be an inclusive and diverse workforce and is committed to not excluding nor allowing citizenship to be a barrier to employment."^[45] "Barriers to employment based on cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious characteristics are contrary to our core values. Citizenship overlaps these demographic characteristics," shared Los Angeles County Public Defender Ricardo García. "An immigrant's experience will advance our vision, mission, and values to protect our clients' legal and human rights and enable us to more readily realize my goal that our employees fully represent the demographics of the population that we serve."^[46]



FUNDING FOR UNDOCREATIVES

CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL (CAC)

Although geographically located in Sacramento, CAC provides funding to Los Angeles arts creatives and California at large, with grants for organizations and individuals alike. It is only in recent years that they have changed a few of their granting rules to allow undocreatives to qualify for some of their smaller individual grants, making California amongst the first to provide funding in the arts for undocreatives. CAC's 2021 Individual Artist Fellowships included at least one undocreative.^[47] In addition, the CAC's Cultural Pathways program provides grants to strengthen the capacity of small, new, and emerging arts organizations that are rooted in communities of color, recent immigrant and refugee communities, and tribal or indigenous groups; and to anchor the cultural and creative work of these organizations into the cultural landscape of the state.^[48] [Arts.ca.gov](https://www.arts.ca.gov)

CENTER FOR CULTURAL INNOVATION (CCI)

CCI, with offices in both Los Angeles and San Francisco, has made some of its funding opportunities available for undocreatives, most recently their unrestricted quick grants.^[49] [Cciarts.org](https://www.cciarts.org)

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & CULTURE

Whereas CAC and CCI have ways to provide undocumented creatives with financial resources, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture has a unique approach to converging art and immigration, although not specifically undocumentedness. They have instituted a residency at the Los Angeles County Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA) as part of their creative strategist program. The residency aims to develop culturally competent strategies that open dialogue and build trust between LA County agencies and the region's immigrant communities.^[50] Artist Phung Huynh was selected to work at OIA in 2021.^[51] Her work speaks to the Southern California immigrant story and celebrates the contributions of immigrants to LA County. She utilizes art as a tool to engage communities and build trust between immigrant people and government agencies.^[52] One of her goals is to demystify the fear of public assistance that immigrants often endure during the earliest stages of their immigration journey, such as the case highlighted by Pablo's testimonio. [Lacountyarts.org](https://lacountyarts.org)

HOUSE OF ALEGRÍA

Although House of Alegría began in 2016, its artist-in-residency program started in 2022. Providing a year-long artist residency that supports emerging (un)documented queer, trans, and nonbinary artists, House of Alegría believes in creating a nourishing environment where artists and culture workers alike can rest, play, create, and reflect. This artist residency centers on the livelihood, wellness, rest, sustainability, and humanity of artists and cultural workers before artistry.^[53] In their words: we value artists and not just art and culture. We value the artist not for what they produce but because they are part of our larger ecosystem.^[54] [Houseofalegria.com](https://houseofalegria.com)





BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

IMMIGRANTS RISING

Although headquartered in San Francisco, Immigrants Rising provides resources for undocreatives in Los Angeles County in the form of seed grants geared toward growing businesses or nonprofits. As per their objectives, grants are available to every individual in the undoc+ spectrum.^[55] Their mission is to empower undocumented youth to achieve educational and career goals through personal, institutional, and policy transformation.^[56] Immigrant Rising is focused on systemic change for the benefit of the undocumented community. [Immigrantsrising.org](https://immigrantsrising.org)

FELLOWSHIPS

DEFINE AMERICAN

Define American, although headquartered in Alexandria, VA, has Brooklyn and Los Angeles offices. Founded by undocumented journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, Define American advocates on behalf of immigrants in media to reveal authentic immigrant stories. In addition to their original productions, films, and consulting with television networks to portray accurate depictions of immigrants, they support undocreatives with the Define American Immigrant Creative Fellowship (open to creatives across the country).^[57] The fellowship supports undocreatives working in narrative forms by providing them with a stipend and career development opportunities. Los Angeles-based writer Féi Hernandez, an immigrant originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, is one of the 2021 Define American Creative Fellows. Hernandez's work centers on trans immigrants. Most recently Define American partnered with Frieze Art Fair to grant an award of \$25,000. Awards are open to immigrants, migrants, and individuals in the undoc+ spectrum. [Defineamerican.com](https://defineamerican.com)

THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL POWER (CCP)

Amongst the handful of organizations providing resources for undocreatives, CCP stands as the zenith of innovation.

“The Disruptors Fellowship is an unprecedented fellowship supporting emerging television writers of color who identify as transgender, non-binary, disabled, or undocumented/formerly undocumented. This 3-month fellowship for LA-based emerging talent includes mentorship, professional development, masterclasses, and a \$6,000 stipend.”^[58]

This unique opportunity is conceived to dismantle the status quo in Hollywood by investing in artists who are directly impacted by systems of oppression. Undocumented creatives lead this effort for undocreatives.^[59] In a recent interview with undocumented and unafraid artist Julio Salgado who oversees this strategy, Salgado clarified that at the center of his practice and this grant is a need to make the undocumented worker explicit in the application to center undocumentedness.^[60] The undocreatives leading this fellowship’s logistical and administrative aspects center their own undocumented experiences through this grant.

At its core, the Disruptors Fellowship removes the pressures associated with the genius complex within artistry by dismantling the necessity to produce a perfect deliverable from each recipient. In a creative industry in which the “reasonable subject by law” is allowed to fail upward and has the opportunity to learn in the industry directly by gifting away free labor, undocreatives who lack these possibilities are expected to create perfect projects every time. In this environment, undocreatives are encouraged to experiment and guide their own educational path. This fellowship aims to avoid sanitized undocumented experiences in favor of allowing each participant the opportunity to celebrate their authentic contributions. The fifteen-week program is created intentionally to allow participants a unique hands-on learning experience about any topic they desire. CCP acknowledges that there are many systemic issues in Hollywood and seeks to create an environment that will foster a community of support for undocreatives as they confront these issues.^[61] Culturalpower.org

COLLECTIVES

UNDOCUMENTED FILMMAKERS COLLECTIVE (UFC)

UFC is a safe, inclusive space made by a collective team working across the country. Founding member Set Hernandez Rongkilyo currently resides in Los Angeles County. UFC is a platform intended to empower creatives in the filmmaking industry who are currently or formerly undocumented. Building on the media justice organizing of other undocumented leaders, UFC tackles the systemic inequities that undocumented immigrants face in the field of filmmaking by centering the expertise of undocumented people not only as sources of stories but more importantly, as creators, artists, and primary audiences.^[62] Undocufilmmakers.org



UNDOC+COLLECTIVE

UNDOC+Collective emerged in 2022, in part as a response to the findings of this report. Co-founders Erika Hirugami and Federico Cuatlacuatl are both members of the undoc+ spectrum.

The UNDOC+Collective has become a nationwide group of undocreatives working toward building collective knowledge regarding the undoc+ spectrum, creating visibility for undocumentedness in contemporary art practices, growing professional opportunities for undocreatives, nurturing a sustainable creative ecosystem for undocreatives, and building an undoc+ network of resources.

In January 2023 the UNDOC+Collective hosted an academic symposium at the University of Virginia, which gathered undocreatives from across the United States and curated an exhibition with an accompanying publications entitled *Pertenecer | Encarnar: The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness in Spanish, English and German*. Most recently, the UNDOC+Collective launched an art residency and exhibition made exclusively for individuals in the undoc+ spectrum. The inaugural residency took place Summer 2023 at Visible Records. Resident benefits included lodging, travel, a dedicated studio space, and a financial stipend of \$2000. [Undocpluscollective.com](https://undocpluscollective.com)



RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted above, the adoption of LA County's new Cultural Policy Strategic Plan is a significant step forward in emphasizing the importance of cultural equity in ensuring that all county residents have access to the arts. If we are to have widespread inclusion of undocreatives in these efforts, it is crucial that we develop basic cultural competency and understanding of artists and arts professionals along the undocu+ spectrum in order to cultivate best practices, improve decision-making processes, and plan more equitably and effectively for undocreatives. This report is an early effort to initiate meaningful research and engagement regarding undocumentedness across the Los Angeles arts sector.

An assortment of interventions can be instituted to prioritize undocreatives' experiences and authentically make space and resources for individuals in the undocu+ spectrum to celebrate their inherent creativity. Policies must do more than create a seat at the table for undocumentedness along with race, gender, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, and political affiliation; policies must provide a clear path for undocreatives to thrive.

A community that must continuously construct, deconstruct, reconstruct, make, and remake concepts of home, belonging, and existence, inherently understands the essence of what it means to be human. By including undocreatives' expertise in every level of the creative industries — and not fetishizing or tokenizing them — the arts industries will benefit from their insights, innovation, and creativity that has migrated with them from across the globe.

The following are concrete solutions that can improve the conditions of undocreatives organized by segments of the art sector. In several instances, citizenship requirements are recommended to be relaxed or abolished. This recommendation is intended to parallel the action of Los Angeles County in allowing arts organizations to hire non-citizens, except in positions where being a U.S. Citizen is required by state and federal law.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS WORKING IN THE ARTS INDUSTRIES TODAY

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Cultural Competence *	Appreciate the cultural expertise and richness of undocreatives.	The arts sector can benefit significantly from undocreatives' wisdom and the ancestral knowledge of immigrants, migrants, and refugees from across the globe.
Language and Knowledge *	Develop an understanding of undocumentedness as a social construct and value undocreatives from a space of trust. Undocumentedness is a spectrum with multiple axis beyond legal status.	Arts professionals educated about undocumentedness could support the undocreative community, combat tokenizing artistic practices, counteract media bias, and advocate for a more equitable political immigrant agenda.
Space for Artistic Expression	Make space for undocreatives to authentically express themselves artistically.	Arts professionals who welcome undocreatives and amplify undocumented voices provide opportunities to support undocreatives in pursuit of their art and a career.

* It is not the responsibility of any undocumented individual to educate others. Be mindful of the time, energy, and effort of undocreatives who are willing to share their knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND CULTURAL SPACES (1 of 3)

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Artistic Inclusion	Relax citizenship requirements and include undocreatives in programming and projects at organizations and in cultural spaces and exhibitions.	Removal of citizenship barriers enables undocreatives to compete and prosper in the arts sector. More inclusive programming will provide undocreatives with greater opportunities for artistic expression and exposure for their art, while enabling the arts community to celebrate aesthetic achievement regardless of citizenship. ^[63]
Knowledge	As institutional leaders —learn about undocumentedness (and related legal issues) and become familiar with the availability and talent of undocreatives. Share this knowledge.	Educated leadership will build capacity for reforms benefiting undocreatives, will enable leaders to counteract bias and tokenism directed at undocreatives, and will enrich leaders' understanding of systemic inequities. Every organization can benefit from generating awareness regarding undocumentedness, and learning from each other.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND CULTURAL SPACES (2 of 3)

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Funding	Seek funding for projects by undocreatives. Act as intermediaries between funding resources and undocreatives. Fund undocreatives.	Seeking resources for undocreatives will benefit individual artists and will expand the diversity of art presented; thus, benefitting the organization's community at large.
Employment	Where legally allowed, relax citizen requirements for jobs and for paid fellowships/ internships; and employ undocreatives as independent contractors. ^[64]	Meaningful and paid employment at organizations and arts spaces will enable undocreatives to build sustainable careers in the arts.
Academic Credentials	Rethink the demand for educational credentials, which are unattainable for many undocreatives.	Lessening the importance of formal education will enable artists of talent to thrive, and will place them on a more equal footing with those who have a level of privilege that allows them to pursue educational advancement for success.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND CULTURAL SPACES (3 of 3)

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Partnerships	Partner, support, grant, retain, and uplift undocreative organizations.	Partnering with and supporting organizations already centering undocumented artists will empower their initiatives, which are at the forefront of this dialogue.
Holistic Support	Provide additional types of support for undocreatives (e.g., studio & rehearsal space, equipment, materials, mentoring, healing circles, health care, undocreative convenings, financial literacy, legal assistance).	An array of support could address systemic, inequitable resource allocation for undocreatives



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Grants and Funding	Relax citizenship requirements for funding. Create grants specifically for undocreatives. ^[65]	Undocreatives will be able to benefit from funding programs offered to other artists and have the opportunity to create a sustainable life in the arts.
Organizational Support	Increase grants to arts organizations supporting or centering undocreatives in their practices (often multi-service and non-arts organizations).	This would enable the distribution of critical resources and support to undocreatives.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES (1 of 2)

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Government Planning & Equity	Include initiatives for undocreatives in government cultural initiatives. As a historically underrepresented community, include undocreatives in efforts to expand cultural equity, diversity, inclusion, and access in LA's cultural sector and throughout County-owned cultural venues.	Integrating undocreatives into governmental initiatives would vastly increase resources and artistic opportunities for undocreatives in Los Angeles County. Including undocreatives in equity, efforts will enable government entities to better realize their overall goals of equity, diversity, inclusion, and access across the sector.
Grants and Funding	Relax citizen requirements for funding provided to artists. Create grants specifically for undocreatives and for organizations that support them. ^[66]	Undocreatives will be able to benefit from funding programs offered to other artists and have the opportunity to create a sustainable life in the arts.
Careers	Where legally allowed, relax citizen requirements for government jobs and paid internships/fellowships. Include undocumented artists in career pathway programs and civic/public art initiatives.	Undocumented artists will benefit from recent efforts to remove citizenship requirements from county employment and be able to participate in County career development programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

(2 of 2)

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Research	Sponsor research into the issues faced by undocreatives and solutions to address systemic inequities.	Greater attention to the needs of undocreatives, data on their representation in the arts sector, and targeted solutions to systemic problems would lay the necessary groundwork for varied private and public interventions. ^[67]
Arts Healing	Involve undocumented artists in arts efforts to address trauma and promote healing and intergenerational well-being.	Undocreatives are invaluable to programs promoting well-being.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

TOPIC	INTERVENTION	IMPACT
Admissions	Develop admission strategies that enable more undocreatives to attain an art education.	Undocreatives will be able to benefit from academic programs offered to other artists.
Tuition & Fees	Evaluate tuition and fee practices to benefit undocreatives more equitably. Develop scholarships for undocreatives. Explore how undocumented artists can be included in fellowships and work study programs.	Undocreatives will be able to benefit from programs offered to other artists that make education more affordable.
Resources	Educate school administrators and counselors on what is possible for undocreatives and allocate resources for their support. Lobby for more public resources to support undocreatives during their academic careers.	This would enable undocreatives to thrive academically and graduate.



CONCLUSION

The analysis presented here is one of the first of its kind in seeking to understand undocumentedness in the arts sector in Los Angeles County. California leads the way in how the country thinks of its creative workforce; therefore, it is only fitting to center this analysis here. On October 9, 2021, Governor Newsom signed SB628 – a senate bill co-sponsored by Arts for LA and California Arts advocates to recognize creative workers across California as essential workers and contributors to overcoming California's greatest challenges through the rebuilding of California's cultural landscape into a more equitable and just framework.^[68] The recent pandemic highlighted that every segment of the arts sector urgently needs to reconfigure itself to address equitable sustainability and representation matters. Opportunities are abundant to empower the undocreative workforce to thrive.



Mission: Arts for LA leads communities, artists, and organizations to advocate for an equitable, healthy, vibrant, and creative Los Angeles region through the arts.

Arts for LA is a voice for the arts in Greater Los Angeles that informs, engages, and mobilizes individuals and organizations to advocate for access to the arts across all communities; arts education for every student; robust investment in the arts; and inclusion of diverse and underrepresented voices. Arts for LA invests in leadership development, growing networks of civically engaged advocates; building deep relationships with elected officials; and working in partnership across sectors to make LA a vibrant, prosperous, creative, and healthy society.

LAURA ZUCKER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

In June 2017, Arts for LA announced the Laura Zucker Fellowship for Policy and Research, the first-ever fellowship for individuals to effect change at the regional level focused on arts and cultural policy development, reform, and implementation in Los Angeles County and the accompanying research necessary to inform such policies.

ERIKA HIRUGAMI

Erika Hirugami, MA. MAAB. is a transnational Japanese-Mexican first-generation immigrant, formerly undocumented.

She holds an MA in Art Business from the Sotheby's Institute of Art, in conjunction with the Drucker School of Management and Getty Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate University. She recently concluded her second Master's Degree at UCLA, entitled "Political Art Action: The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness." Hirugami also holds degrees from UCLA in the fields of Art History, Chicano Studies, and Mexican Studies. She is currently a teaching fellow and doctoral candidate at UCLA, where she epistemologically braids the aesthetics of undocumentedness to challenge immigration policy and politics.

Hirugami is the founder and CEO of CuratorLove, Co-founder of UNDOC+Collective, ED at AHSC, a Professor at CBMArts and SMC, Arts for LA Fellow, NALAC NLI Fellow, CCI Catalyst, and DAICOR Fellow. As a Getty and Kress Foundation Fellow, she has developed curatorial statements at museums across Mexico and the United States. After being a Public Art Curator for the Department of Cultural Affairs in the City of Los Angeles, Hirugami became the Curatorial Director for the Ronald McDonald House Charities while leading various commercial galleries. She has curated exhibitions across the globe, and her written work has been published internationally. Erikahirugami.com





APPENDICES

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Gracias & Piali!

From Nahuatl: I will carry you in my heart until the next time our paths cross.

TERMINOLOGY

Amá: mom.

Artist: A person who creates art.

Arts Professional: Anyone who financially benefits from the creative industries.

Autoethnography: A research method grounded in self-reflection as a means for analyzing larger issues.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

Blue Chip: the term 'blue chip' has validity insofar as the concept implies well-established historical art and artists of the highest aesthetic quality, which are simultaneously considered to be a reliable long-term investment."^[69]

Chicana: Historically an American woman of Mexican descent. Contemporarily it can mean an American woman of Latinx ancestry.

Coyote: Immigrant smuggler who brings people across the Mexico/United States border. Typically, a migrant pays a coyote a hefty sum for guidance crossing the border.

Creative Industries: As per the Otis Creative Economic Report, five main sectors create the bulk of the creative industries: architecture and related services, creative goods and products, entertainment and digital media, fashion, and fine and performing arts.^[70]

Citizen: A person who legally belongs to a nation by birth or naturalization.

DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. An immigration policy that allows immigrant

children a two-year deferred action from deportation and a work permit. This permission must be renewed every two years.

DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Green Card: Officially known as a permanent residency card, which allows an immigrant to live and work permanently in the United States.

ICE: Immigration Customs Enforcement

Immigration: Geographical displacement of an individual to settle in a foreign country.

Immigrant Generations:

- **.5 Generation:** Said of immigrant children who enter their host country before they are fully cognizant of the legal implications of migration.
- **First Generation:** Said of an adult who migrates outside of their ancestral homeland.
- **Second Generation:** Offspring of immigrants who are the first to be born in their host country (in this case, US).

Imposter Syndrome: involves feelings of self-doubt and personal incompetence that persist despite education, experience, or accomplishments.

Intersectionality: an analytical framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand how aspects of an individual's identity create different discrimination modes. Of importance to this study, Crenshaw's original theory of knowledge paid little attention

to undocumentedness. Therefore, this terminology is seldom employed in this analysis.

Latinx: The classification of artists or individuals as Latinx can be fraught with issues, and this gender-neutral term is not universally embraced. Still, I adopt it here as an inclusive, forward-looking term because of its growing use to recognize gender diversity within our communities.^[71] Latinx is assumed here to divest from Hispanic and Latino/a linguistically, but is considered inclusive of all the members of the brown community (Hispanic, Latinx, Chicax, Black, etc.).

Migration: Process of leaving one country to another.

Naturalization: course of action taken to become the citizen of a foreign nation.

Nepantla: comes from Nahuatl (lingua franca of the Mexica/Aztec pre-contact) and roughly

translates to in the middle of or between.

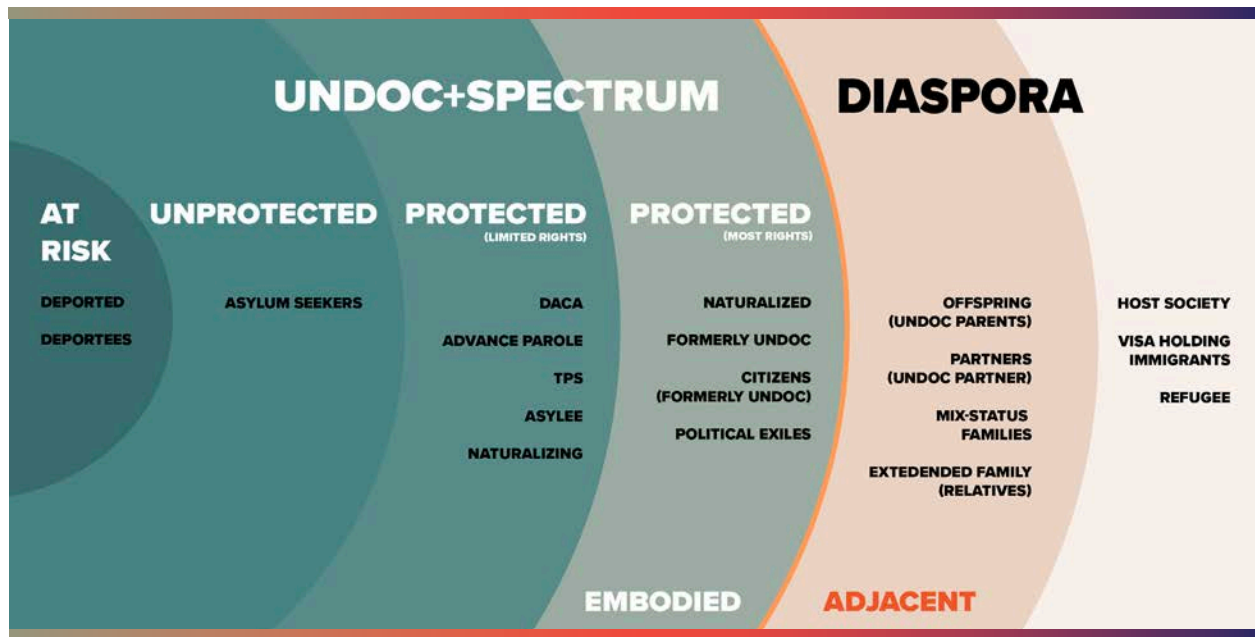
Papeles: Spanish for papers, for the migrant community synonymous with naturalization.

Positionality: refers to how social position and power differences shape identities and access in society.^[72] For the purpose of this investigation, positionality acknowledges and transcends intersectionality by acknowledging citizenship and therefore is adopted in this analysis.

Reasonable Subject by Law: a male member of the dominant culture, whose existence in juxtaposition allows for the values and perspectives of the dominant group to serve as a crude surrogate for a more refined understanding of other perspectives. Following the definition of Jordan and Harris' rational actor of economics.^[73]

TPS: Temporary Protected Status.





Undocumented: For the purposes of this analysis, any individual not authorized to work applies directly to people residing in Los Angeles County, California, United States.

Undocreative: Undocumented members of the creative industries (artists and arts professionals).

UNDOC+ Spectrum: Individuals within the undoc+ spectrum who have lived or are currently living undocumented. Examples of the undoc+ spectrum are current or former undocumented individuals. “There is no easy way to define undocumentedness and no single definition that stands true across the globe. In the words of Jose Antonio Vargas, if an estimated 45 million immigrants live in America, then there are 45 million ways of being an immigrant in America. Like all groups, we are not a monolith. Of those forty-five million immigrants, and as per the Department of

Homeland Security, eleven million immigrants currently residing in the United States are unauthorized. Borrowing Jose Antonio Vargas’ logic, there are eleven million ways of being undocumented in the United States. Thus, to completely comprehend undocumentedness, and in the words of Federico Cuatlacuatl, one must consider undocumentedness a spectrum.”^[74]

UNDOC+ Diaspora: Individuals in the undocumented diaspora are directly or indirectly affected by undocumentedness but have not embodied undocumentedness themselves. Examples of individuals in the undocumented diaspora are children or partners of individuals in the undoc+ spectrum.

Under the Table: informally, in secret, with no paper trail.

USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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COVER

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 2

#FreeThemAll (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 3

#FreeThemAll (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 4

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 5

Monuments: Atlanta's
Immigrants (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 7

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 8

De Aquí y De Allá (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 9

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 10

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 11

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 12

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 13

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 14

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 15

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 16

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
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PG 17

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 18

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 24

De Aquí y De Allá (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 26

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 27

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 28

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 30

Untitled Photograph
By Leo Zhang
Image courtesy of artist

PG 31

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
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PG 35

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PG 36

Untitled (detail)
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PG 38

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 40

Estela Tejiendo (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 41

Untitled (detail)
By Mercedes Zapata
Image courtesy of artist

PG 42

Monuments: Atlanta's
Immigrants (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 43

Untitled (detail)
By Mercedes Zapata
Image courtesy of artist

PG 45

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 46

UNDOC+ Spectrum
By Erika Hirugami
Image courtesy of author

PG 49

Family Portrait
[Revisited] (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 53

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

PG 55

Untitled (detail)
Campesinos y Colores Series
By Lino Martinez
Image courtesy of artist

END COVER

#FreeThemAll (detail)
By Yehimi Cambrón Álvarez
Image courtesy of artist

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Michelle Espinoza





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