

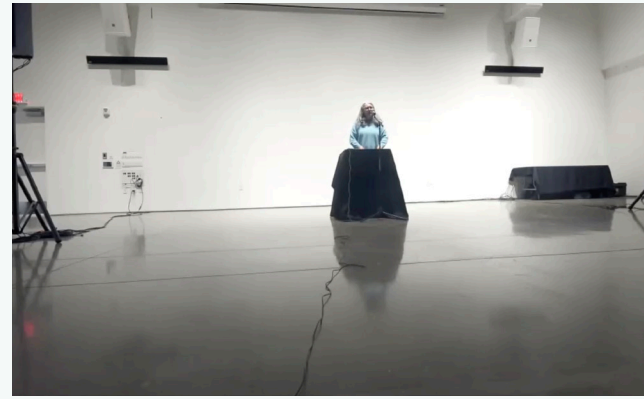
# Communal Responsibility Keynote Lecture

By Renata Blanco Gorbea



During the week of February 28, 2022, Creative Citizens in Action at California College of the Arts (CCA@CCA) hosted the Fluid Mutualism Symposium. This event included a series of lectures and activities that relate to the philosophy and daily practice of Indigenous nations in southern Mexico. I attended the Communal Responsibility Keynote lecture on March 2 held by Maestra Celia Herrera Rodríguez (Xicana/O'dami). Celia Herrera Rodríguez is a painter, performance, and installation artist who incorporates Chicano and Mexican thought in her work. She has taught at CCA as part of the Diversity Studies program, as well as at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Barbara at Las Maestras Center. The lecture served as a brief introduction to the practice of responsibility and how it relates to our identity and personal development.

Maestra Celia did a breakdown of the importance of understanding all our responsibilities in this world, and how they affect our everyday practice as well as our artistic development. She began with the obligations each individual has to oneself and then moved forward explaining how we all have small duties around us that not only affect how we see the world, but also how we move through it, such as caring for our hygiene, eating full meals, taking a break, among many others. She also highlighted the importance of communicating our responsibilities through our creative practice, and how this also becomes a role we must fulfill. But most importantly, she highlighted how in order to fulfill our obligations to others, we first have to fulfill the duties we have to ourselves. We cannot take care of others if we do not take care of ourselves, and taking care of ourselves instantly connects us to our environment and the outside world. By fulfilling our obligations to ourselves we immediately connect with the environment, because many of these responsibilities require being in contact with




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nature, such as eating or bathing. We link ourselves to the outside world by creating an image of ourselves (based on the fulfillment of our duties), which is how we present to others, therefore marking the way we fit into society. This vision of responsibility is part of Chicano culture and derives from Mexican Indigenous cultures from the south of the country. While growing up in Mexico, I did not realize how this tradition or vision is visible throughout our society. When I was younger, my grandma and the adults around me would hint at the importance of being a good daughter, a good person, a good student, of taking care of myself, etc. I was raised with this notion that in order to be a good person you had to be respectful of yourself and others, you had to work hard, and you had to stay true to yourself no matter what. Therefore, once I started writing and my family noticed that it came easily to me, my first real responsibility was born. My parents always highlighted the importance of sharing my talent with the world and working hard in order to develop as an artist.

Even though I was reluctant at first, as the years have passed, I have accepted that I have a responsibility as a writer to put thoughts into words and create new stories. This responsibility has helped me find my passions and connect further with my community. I have now developed a love for my craft that derives from all artists' responsibility to communicate with the world. I believe at first it was hard for me to come to terms with writing and the passion I had for it, because in Mexico, pursuing a career in the arts is usually frowned upon. While all of my friends were looking forward to becoming business owners, lawyers, and scientists, I spent my time reading books and visiting museums. My family was always very supportive of my passions and encouraged me to major in something where my writing could develop. It wasn't until I had the op-





portunity to volunteer in a museum, that I started appreciating my writing as art, and the possibilities it brought. After that moment I fell in love with the arts and that is when I realized that I wanted to become an art journalist or an art researcher. If it wasn't for the support of my family and the opportunities they gave me, I would never have realized the importance of my writing and how it could affect others.

I had never seen my responsibilities as directly as I have after the lecture. I thought of my responsibilities more like things that I was meant to do or that I needed to do in order to be a good person. Maestra Celia really made me look at my background as a Hispanic person in a different way; she made me realize the importance of my point of view and my practice in order to make way for other young Hispanic artists and writers to come. I have the responsibility to work hard in order to change all the stigmas and stereotypes and to make the art world more inclusive for everyone. If we really want to see a change in our society, it is important that all of us see the responsibilities we have to ourselves and others in order to make said change possible.

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