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## Fresno State graduate takes art global

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Esteban Cortez / The Collegian

College graduation often symbolizes the end of one's educational journey, but for artist and 1993 Fresno State graduate Blanka Amezkua, graduation was only the beginning of an adventure that would take her to the other side of the world and back.

Following graduation, Amezkua's first stop was San Francisco where she lived from 1993 until 1997. When Amezkua first moved there she started by living a series of odd jobs before becoming a library assistant for a law firm where she sorted cases.

"I loved it. I felt privileged to have a good job and to still have time for my art," said Amezkua.

While in San Francisco, Amezkua would often show her art in cafés, group shows and other non-profit locations. Most of the exhibits she did were also for non-profit, but she did sell some of them.

In 1997, while taking some classes at San Francisco State, she enrolled in the foreign exchange program, which led her to Florence, Italy to study at the prestigious Academy of Florence.

"Italy was a very important part of my growth as an artist and person," Amezkua said. "Being in a foreign country really enhances who you are as a person and adds another layer to you culturally."

One thing that really struck her while living in Italy was how similar it was to other places she had previously been. While it may have been distant geographically, she felt that culturally it wasn't very different from places like Mexico or the United States.

"Ideologically and culturally we are not all that different. The culture of Italy is a lot like the Latino culture. It's just that when you are removed from where you live you think you are far away but then you realize that one of the only true differences is language. Everything else is similar. Traveling helps you become more aware of how societies are constructed and how the world came to be," Amezkua said.

In 1998 after spending a year in Florence, Italy, Amezkua moved to Mexico where she began painting more than she had before taking the lessons learned from Italy on color and applying them to her work.

While in Mexico many of her paintings focused on the female body and fruits. She traveled to Taxco, Mexico where she painted for a while before landing a job in Cuernavaca, her hometown.

In 2000, Amezkua moved back to San Francisco where her primary focus was working on art. During this time she also worked with UC Berkely on a special project involving immigrants and access to medicine before moving to New York in 2003.

Amezkua's first job in New York was at a Mexican market called La Sirena. While living in the Bronx she became an art teacher for middle school students at three different Jesuit schools. It was a different experience for her considering she had never taught. The job took her to three different Burroughs as she traveled around New York to the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Then in 2007 Amezkua's nephew was killed in a car accident. The accident shook her world. She spent a month in Fresno helping her family before returning to New York. Upon returning to New York she felt the need for community.

"New York can be a lonely place. It can really make you feel isolated and after the accident I needed to be around people," Amezkua said.

In 2008 this helped spark the creation of the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project. Essentially, the project was people coming in and installing their artwork in her bedroom. Then people would come in to her apartment and view the work. Not only were the artists asked to exhibit their artwork, but also to cook a meal and give a workshop to those who came to visit. Each artist had a month to display their artwork in her bedroom. On the first Wednesday of every month the Bronx Cultural Trolley would stop by her apartment to let people view the exhibits.

"The project was a first for me. Before this project I had never organized anything. I worked with a lot of artists and saw a lot of people. The thing that made me proud was that we were able to display art to the public in an alternative venue. It wasn't your typical place that you would see art," Amezkua said. "It also really showed the power that art has. It brought a disenfranchised community like the Bronx together."

In 2010 the Bronx Blue Bedroom Projects run came to an end as Amezkua left New York for Athens, Greece. While in Greece Amezkua taught English to people in private lessons, while also starting her 3 Walls on Wednesday project. The 3 Walls on Wednesday project is a project where Amezkua places art in three public locations throughout Athens. She would then speak about the art and discuss it with people.

"This project is another way for me to promote art, and another way to display it in an alternative setting," Amezkua said.

Amezkua still does 3 Walls on Wednesday while also traveling back to Mexico, Fresno, and New York City.

She believes the most important thing that can be taken from her journey is the power that art has to bring people and communities together. She never envisioned the journey she would go on throughout her life, but believes the lessons she learned while in school were essential to her success.

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