

Migrant Heart

I've been collecting winged hearts for years—especially from Mexico, where they're everywhere: handmade in tin, clay, or wood, each one perfectly imperfect and glowing with color. I've always loved them. For me, they carry something tender—love, kindness, and hope.

When I began working on *Migrant Heart*—the winged heart that would become the centerpiece of my installation *Nunca Olvides Que Tienes Alas* (*Never Forget You Have Wings*)—that symbol, half sacred, half ordinary, returned to me with new weight. I wanted to create a piece for the exhibition *¡Te Amo Porque S.O.S. Pueblo!* (*I Love You Because You Are My People*) that could uplift people—a fragile community living under constant fear and uncertainty.

As I worked, I started recognizing myself—not just as an artist, but as an immigrant. That realization grew stronger during my conversation with Tess Thackara for *The New York Times*. When she visited my studio in Brooklyn, I was nervous—worried about speaking about my work with a journalist from a publication of that caliber. But from the start, she was more interested in hearing my story. As I recounted memories from my childhood, my upbringing, and my arrival in the U.S. nearly thirty years ago, I felt the shadow of impostor syndrome hovering—but alongside it came a deep gratitude: for all that I've received from this country, and for how profoundly it has shaped me.

That duality—doubt and gratitude—became the undercurrent of the work. What began as an act of creation became an act of self-discovery. In the end, *Migrant Heart* revealed itself as both a gift and a mirror: a gesture of giving, and a reflection of everything I had yet to understand about myself.



“Corazón Migrante,” the winged heart from the installation Nunca olvides que tienes alas (Never Forget You Have Wings), 2025. Photographed during the exhibition ¡Te Amo Porque S.O.S. Pueblo!, BronxArtSpace. The work became both a gift and a mirror—an offering to those whose journeys inspired it.

I am an immigrant, and I am an artist. It took time to fully embrace those words together—to understand that both identities coexist and define who I’ve become.

I came to the United States on a student visa to pursue a graduate degree. Later, I had the privilege of working at the Museum of Modern Art and the United Nations—places that broadened my view of the world and quietly planted the seeds for my later work as an artist. At the UN, I worked as a designer, creating materials that helped children and young adults understand the organization’s work and its impact on humankind—on education, human rights, and the pursuit of peace. That experience taught me that visual language can inform, inspire, and heal. It was there that I first understood design—and later art—as a form of service.

For years, I struggled with the feeling that my journey as an immigrant was too privileged to count, that my relative ease diminished my right to belong to that word. But I’ve learned that migration has many forms: some chosen, others imposed. My story is simply one thread in a vast, interconnected web of movement and hope.

¡Te Amo Porque S.O.S. Pueblo! was conceived as a portal of care, resistance, and joy—an offering from and for the migrant community. Organized by Blanka Amezkua, Marco Saavedra, and María Ponce Sevilla—artists and advocates whose lives have been shaped by migration—the exhibition brought together more than thirty immigrant and first-generation artists working across diverse media. Beyond an exhibition, it also served as an information hub, providing community resources and legal guidance. Through both the artworks and its extensive public programming—including shared meals, rights clinics, and collaborations with local organizations—the project became a living response to hostility and hate: an act of love and resilient solidarity through art.

The exhibition’s title riffs on a poem by the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti, transforming “*Te amo porque sos pueblo*” into “*S.O.S. Pueblo*”—a cry for help and solidarity, a reminder of the ongoing emergency that surrounds immigrant communities. In a profoundly moving curatorial choice, the exhibition omitted artist bios and instead displayed childhood photographs. Only first names were shown, to protect some participants’ identities and to keep the focus on community rather than the individual.

That gesture struck me deeply. It erased hierarchy and ego, returning us all to the innocence and vulnerability from which our stories began.



Standing beside my six-year-old self, alongside the childhood photographs of other participating artists at ¡Te Amo Porque S.O.S. Pueblo!. The image was taken in Germany, where my parents sought work and a better life for our family. It reminds me that my story began with migration long before I called myself an immigrant.

There is something haunting and healing about standing beside your younger self. In that photo, I am six— quiet and observant, far from my home country. We were living in Germany, where I learned a new language and watched my parents rebuild their lives with courage and perseverance. Decades later, I stood beside that same image at BronxArtSpace, now a mother, artist, and immigrant by choice.

Around that same age, Blanka Amezkua—one of the exhibition’s curators—was crossing the U.S. border for the first time, pretending to be asleep in the back of her uncle’s car. While we both shared the fact that we were children without consent in those pivotal moments, we did so under very different circumstances.

I’m aware that my migration was voluntary, while for many others it was not. Yet the curators’ choice to include that photograph allowed me to inhabit both truths—to stand in gratitude and solidarity at once. The child in the image had already lived through displacement and adaptation. Seeing her again reminded me that migration doesn’t begin with crossing a border; it begins with the moment we learn to belong in more than one place.

The installation *Nunca olvidas que tienes alas* (*Never Forget You Have Wings*) grew from those realizations. At its center floats a black papier-mâché sacred heart with a mirror inscribed *Nunca olvidas que tienes alas*. Two open wings, shaped from metal wire and edged with barbed wire, are filled with fragile tissue-paper feathers tied in place with zip ties—the same kind often used during mass arrests of migrants. The contrast between strength and delicacy speaks to the migrant experience: the tension between control and vulnerability, fear and hope.

The mirror invites viewers to see themselves reflected—to recognize their own capacity for flight. *Corazón Migrante* is completed and activated as an installation by a coir doormat stenciled *ADELANTE*—meaning both “forward” and “come in”—which invites viewers to step into the work, open their arms, and become part of it.



*Blanka Amezkua standing within the installation *Nunca olvides que tienes alas*. Dozens of people stepped into the piece to take photos—turning it into a space of connection, empathy, and flight.*

While many participating artists in the exhibition came to support and celebrate the immigrant community, we could not ignore that a few chose not to attend their own opening out of fear that authorities might appear. How could we blame them?

In theory, I have no reason to feel unsafe. Yet, with the current political climate, even citizenship no longer feels absolute. It's exhausting and heartbreaking to watch a nation built by immigrants turn its back on its own essence. I've begun, quietly, to consider returning to Mexico. But my feelings are mixed. Part of me wants to stay—to continue supporting the people and communities who shaped me. Another part longs for home—for the soil that raised me, its vibrant colors, and the language that shaped me.

I often describe my early years in the United States as a kind of “red-carpet experience.” Doors opened; opportunities appeared. For a long time, I felt uneasy about that privilege—why I had it, and others didn't. But over time, I've realized that privilege can be transformed into

responsibility. My art has become a way to balance that equation: a gesture of gratitude, a means to amplify other voices, a way of giving back.

Wherever I am, I will continue my work as an artist. My purpose remains the same: to create art that connects the familiar with the poetic, the personal with the collective; art that invites empathy and small acts of transformation.

After *¡Te Amo Porque S.O.S. Pueblo!* and everything that followed, I understood that the greatest reward is not recognition, but connection. *Migrant Heart* uplifted the spirits of those who saw themselves in it. It gave wings—real and symbolic—to a community that has carried so much.

I still remember Blanka's words after the opening: "*Gracias por darnos alas.*"

Those words will stay with me.

I'd love to see those wings rise again someday—set free, dancing higher, carried by the very people who gave them meaning.

Postscript: After reading my draft, Blanka Amezkua encouraged me to revisit the *Immigrant Movement International Manifesto (2011)*. I invite you to read it. It echoes *Migrant Heart*—reminding me that art, like migration, is an act of movement, courage, and collective hope.