

Documentation:

The photography of Berenice Chavez

By Lisa Britton

LA GRANDE — Berenice Chavez photographs her mother to preserve her memories, always a bit worried that one day her mom will be sent back to Mexico.

"It's an insight into a life most people don't have. A lot of kids don't have to translate for their parents at the Immigration Center," Chavez said.

Chavez earned an art degree from Eastern Oregon University in 2019, and a second degree in anthropology in 2020.

On Feb. 5, she will open a show titled "Documentation" at Art Center East, 1006 Penn St.

Chavez's collection of large-scale photographs featuring her mother and little sister will be on display through March 27.

She began photographing her family in 2018 when her mother faced deportation to Mexico for the third time.

"It was instant panic," she recalls of receiving the news from her older sister. "That's why I take all these photos. It's never guaranteed. I just wanted these photographs for myself in case she was deported in three months — or three weeks."

Chavez works in film. She uses her 35 mm Canon for candid shots of her mother cooking, doing laundry, or sitting with her father.

Her 4x5 large format camera is reserved for portraits.

"I love how slow the process is — really taking the time," she said. "It's more intimate, and in the moment."

She displayed several of her family photographs in her senior exhibition.

The ACE show will feature a larger array of her photographs, each measuring about 3 feet by 4

Chavez exhibit

When: Feb. 5 - March 27

Where: Art Center East, 1006 Penn Ave., La Grande

feet.

Chavez hasn't always been into photography or art.

"I never considered myself an artist at all," she said.

During her senior year of high school in Umatilla, she developed an interest in pursuing photojournalism as a career.

"How fun would that be to photograph people and places?" she said.

Her "Documentation" project reflects this approach, with her mom as the main subject.

"All the images tell my family's story," she said.

Although she works in film, she scans the negatives and edits her photographs in Photoshop.

"As I edited the photos, it was a way of spending more time with her," she said.

Her show tells the story of undocumented immigrants by



Photo by Berenice Chavez

Chavez photographs her mother in everyday situations.

"documenting" her mother's daily life in the United States.

"Undocumented immigrants must live hidden in the shadows, but my mother's legal situation allows me to bring my family's story into the public eye," Chavez wrote in her artist's statement. "My work questions what it means to be an American — legal status versus the amount of time spent living in the country you call home. For

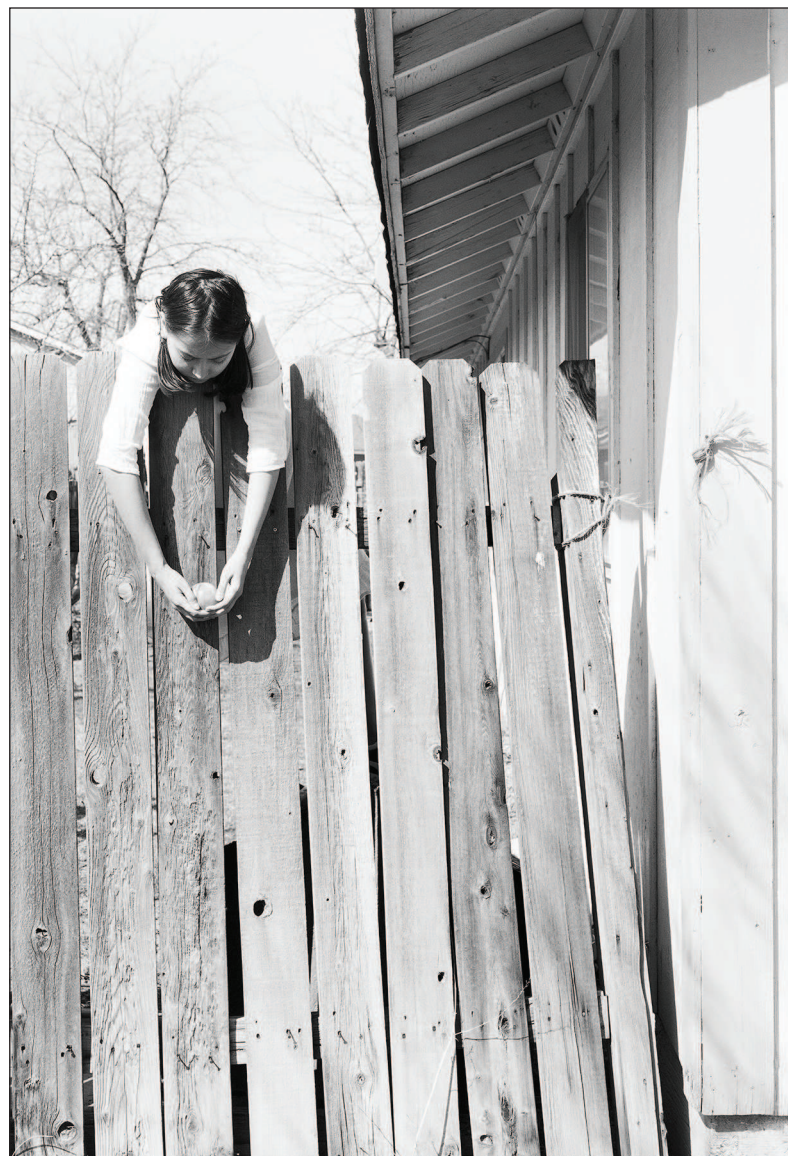


Photo by Berenice Chavez

Chavez's little sister is often a subject in her photographs.

me, these photographs take the place of the legal citizenship that

my mother does not have. They are proof that she belongs."



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