Painting the Basque American Diaspora

Pintar la Diáspora Vasca Americana
Peindre la Diaspora Basque Américaine
Amerikako Euskal Diaspora Tintatzen

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Abstract:

Extensive research has been done on the Basque American diaspora, and representations of its diverse members have been made principally in writing, photography and film. In this article I discuss my use of the specific medium of portrait painting as an alternative representation of the American Basque diaspora in the early 21st century. I explain how portrait-painting can contribute to the study and visual portrayal of the Basque diaspora by its long-term creative process and accumulation of information.

Keywords: Basque Diaspora, Identity, Portrait-painting, Ethnography, Alternative Representation

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Resumen

Se han hecho investigaciones extensivas sobre la diáspora vasca americana, y representaciones de sus diversos miembros han sido principalmente por medio de escritos, fotografías y películas. En este articulo trato de mi uso del medio de la pintura como representación alternativa de la diáspora vasca americana del siglo 21. Explico cómo la pintura del retrato puede contribuir al estudio y al representar visualmente la diáspora vasca por su proceso creativo de largo término y su acumulación de información.

Palabras claves: Diáspora vasca, Identidad, Pintura del retrato, Etnografía, Representación alternativa

Résumé

De nombreuses recherches ont été faites sur la diaspora basque américaine, et des représentations de ses divers membres ont pris la forme principalement d'écrits, de photographies et de filmes. Dans cet article, j'élabore sur mon utilisation de la peinture comme moyen de représentation alternative de la diaspora basque américaine du 21ème. J'explique comment la peinture de portraits peut contribuer à l'étude et à la représentation visuelle de la diaspora basque par son processus créatif à long-terme et son accumulation d'information.

Mots clefs : Diaspora basque, Identité, Peinture du portrait, Ethnographie, Représentation alternative

Laburpena

Amerikako euskal diasporaren inguruko ikerketa sakonak burutu dira, eta haren baitako zenbait kideren errepresentazioa idazkien, argazkien zein pelikulen bidez egin izan da batez ere. Artikulu honetan nire pinturaren bidez 21. mendeko euskal diaspora amerikarraren irudikapen alternatiboa egiten dut. Erretratuak margotzeak euskal diasporaren ikerketan eta hura bisualki erakusten lagundu dezakeela azaltzen dut, amaitzeak dakarren prozesu luzeagatik eta eskaintzen duen informazio metaketarengatik.

Gako-hitzak: Euskal diaspora, Nortasuna, Portreta margotzen, Etnografia, Errepresentazio alternatiba

INTRODUCTION

The Basque American diaspora has been extensively researched, with accounts in the form of scholarly texts, literature, photography and film. These retrace the economic, sociological and political roots of Basque migration, their settlements, and the development of Basque culture and identity in the new country. Scholarly texts especially point to the plurality and heterogeneity of the Basque American experience (see for example Totoricaguena 2005; Douglass 2013; Douglas and Bilbao 1975; Etulain and Echeverria 1999; Alvarez Gila 2013).

For my ethnographic research on identity in this so-called Basque American diaspora[1] in the 21st century, I chose to explore the use of another medium of representation: that of painting, and specifically portrait painting. I first began using portraiture as part of my research in the Basque Country where I looked at how Basque identity was negotiated and expressed through art. At the time, portrait painting served me as an additional ethnographic tool, another way to make contact and communicate with people (Bray 2015). The violence of state nationalism on both the French and Spanish sides of the Basque Country, coupled with that of the Basque separatist paramilitary group ETA, polarized society in the Basque Country in such a way that I personally found it often difficult to engage in relaxed conversational exchange. Portrait painting provided me with the possibility of inviting both myself and the volunteer model into a sanctuary of collaboration involving simply facing each other in contemplation, with no need to talk or engage in the usual societal modes of interaction. It also offered me a way of caring and opening up more freely, in a contemplative activity in which I could be more myself and the model could accept to be looked at and to relax in an activity extraneous to his or her habitual social conventions and constraints. Consequently, I painted individuals just sitting or standing, as they could feel comfortable, dressed as they ordinarily were, without the accompanying interlocutors with which I was used to seeing them in their habitual social settings. The long-term nature of the project allowed us both to let down barriers and build collaboration and trust. [See Figure 1]

Representation

When I would then show the portraits to the public, I had some people, including anthropologists, express to me puzzlement upon seeing these portraits and learning that they were part of my research on Basque identity. They questioned what was Basque about these paintings, as they could not find in the portraits of the featured Basques (some of which were well-known figures in the Basque nationalist movement)

1 For a clarification on the use of the term diaspora, see Story and Walker 2015.

Figure 1.
Painting Nestor Basterretxea in his house, Hondarribia, 2010. Photograph by Juan Pablo Zabala.

anything significant or outwardly recognizable that would identify them as Basque. For instance, they did not pose in a 'certain' way, most had no distinctly 'Basque' appendage or artifact featured on or beside them - none of them wore a beret, there was no Basque flag or typically Basque landscape in the background - nothing in particular could lead the viewer to draw any predictable 'cultural' conclusion. Nor did any of my portraits depict stereotypical physiological traits, as traditional painters of 'Basque people' have been wont to do.

In other words, neither the painting style, nor the subject represented in the paintings, seemed to these puzzled commentators to represent Basqueness. Did they misunderstand my paintings, or did I misunderstand Basque identity? Neither is, as I believe, true. Their puzzled reaction is not the main, but an intended effect of my work. So in this sense, they understood and asked the right questions – and by raising them, participated in my research on the larger question of what identity is in terms of collective memory and on the individual level – and in particular, how both the collective and individual levels interact and are often in conflict.

That these commentators found their expectations disappointed is not surprising, if we think of the history of Western art, especially the tradition of portrait-painting, and

the development of visual anthropology. Painted portraits, especially realist ones, have a long history of a certain kind of representation: when not depicting icons and religious figures, its tradition has involved the depiction of people in their social or political status (Bray forthcoming). In the 20th century, socialist realist painters also engaged in romanticized portrayals of the working class and of life under totalitarian regimes. This was also a time that painters engaged in what was considered then ethnography: depicting the 'noble savage', and individuals as specimens of neat folkloric-biological categories, a practice that was particularly popular in the late 19th and 20th century nationalist spirit, also when it came to depicting Basques (MacClancy 1997; 2007).

Thanks then to the development of the camera, which led to the profligate production of photographs and film, we have fashioned a certain way of seeing the world and of visually making sense of ourselves (Berger 2013; Sontag 2005; Barthes 1981). Concurrently, photography and film have been the main visual media for anthropologists, with the principal aim of documenting the ways of life and material culture of different peoples (Hockings 2012). This has also involved documenting the physiologies of these people for purposes of classification. In this vein, Basque people are also usually photographed or filmed dressed in typically Basque attire or engaged in some sort of Basque-ascribed ritual. Whether the person being photographed or filmed wears this special attire and plays for instance *pelota* only a few days a year, and the rest of the time lives in a way that is not conventionally Basque, is considered irrelevant – this person gets photographed to represent 'the Basque' on that day he or she is dressed for the specifically typical activity of *pelota*-playing. We then remember and think of that person and his or her Basque identity principally following this representation. This, in a way, has been the curse of the 'visual turn' in human life – realist images of ourselves give us more information about ourselves and, at the same time, are reductive. While texts, paintings, drawings, cartoons, abstract art all tend to be appreciated as subjective interpretations, as specific personal perceptions of reality, photographs and film affect our neurological receptors and block this caution – we tend to consider them more truthful, even if we are aware of the subjectivity involved in their creation.[2]

When it comes to depicting a people, we are inclined to want to do so by featuring visible conventional markers of their identity (Banks and Morphy 1997; Story and Walker 2015). No matter how objective we might try to be, we are inevitably involved in the construction of representation. While we are aware that pictures are subjective and therefore partial images of the world, they still have an impact on us as

2 See also "The Photographic Turn" by Geoffrey Nunberg, seminar on The History of Information 103, March 16 2017, University of Berkeley, California. https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1457197/files/70815083/download?verifier=lvrYmgwWpVReEwzDfNEPlfUZKKbXHw8QRR3IKUEs.

snapshots of reality, and thus they become signifiers of truth. The result is then that we come to expect to see identities following those conventional visual forms.

As social scientists have highlighted, identity is not just a social construction, but an imagined community. But people can imagine this community very differently. These different imaginations are often in conflict with each other, with a few usually dominating the others. These imaginations involve altercasting not only with the 'external' world, that is the non-members, but also within the imagined community. There is thus constant negotiation of what a determined identity is and who belongs to it. The practice of identification thus involves "living boundaries" (Bray 2011) – people relating and defining themselves in relation to each other. The implication thereof is that a.) the visual representation of identity in the form of pictures is often misleading, as it alludes to an objectivity and staticism that does not exist; and b.) the visual representation of identity in the form of pictures is with the objectiveness they allude to – intentionally or not – and bears the risk that the representer – the producer of the image – makes a claim to authority about what the identity should be. Proof of the effectiveness of such claims is the questioning of the commentators mentioned above about the Basqueness of my paintings. Contemporary visual anthropologists are increasingly reflecting on this issue (Pink et al 2004; Pink 2007). In view of this reflection it is even more worthwhile to experiment with other media, something that some anthropologists have also begun to engage in (Schneider and Wright 2013).

In contrast to photographs and film, the subjectivity in a painting is more obvious. Bearing this mind, in my production of images via the medium of paint, I set out to experiment with the idea of how the portrait could bring forth another representation that is reflective of the issue that any visual representation of identity bears the risk of misrepresenting identity as static, objective and making the authoritative claim of what Basqueness is.

Painting for my research in the Basque Country, I came to experience how a painted portrait could offer a different relationship to the subject than photography and film; by being executed over several hours spent working together, during which the model and the painter communicate with each other, the painting also accumulates information of a non visual form. This may not stand out and be easily seen in the portraits, but it is there in the rendering of the portrait. Despite not flagging conventional visual identity markers, the portrait can still communicate about the person. They can show how the individuals also live the boundaries of Basque identity in ways that are not captured in static images of one-time moments. Rather, the individuals have multiple ways by which they relate their identity in the context of their daily life that cannot necessarily be seen and categorized in one specific and determined way. Thus the portrait can present an alternative story of identity.

All the people I painted and interviewed in the American West had a biological or similarly intimate link with being Basque, that is, they could trace at least a part of their kin to the Basque Country. Yet, what they personally made of this link is in particular one thing: diverse. To some, their idea of Basque culture is a central part of their life. To others it is only a detail in their personal history rather than crucial to their identity. For still others, their Basque heritage is extremely important, but they do not fully identify with the way Basque identity is popularly portrayed and so they remain more private about this part of their identity.

Our conversations were often about Basque-related issues, because this was something that we both had in common and were interested in talking about. These conversations inevitably flavored our encounter, our mood and the tone of the portrait. Most individuals sat for me simply dressed and sitting or standing however was comfortable for a portrait to be done in a few hours over several days, either in their homes or in mine. At the beginning, many felt they needed to strike a particular pose, and tried to keep a smile, but over the course of the several hours of working together, they would relax into a pose that just felt natural. Smiling could also be replaced with different expressions according to different moods over time, that would balance out into a more subtle look. So the individuals in the portraits didn't aim to "be Basque" in a pre-conceptualized way but were simply being themselves, with whatever Basqueness they might feel transmitted without conventional visual markers, but rather in more discreet and implicit ways. This is what I aimed to show in the painting, and in this fashion I recognize that I am myself involved in the construction of an (alternative) representation of these American people of Basque descent.

In what follows, I will give anecdotal background to four portraits that I painted of Basque Americans, accompanying these with photographs of the pictures. These accounts,[3] albeit partial, serve to display some context to the portraits and help the viewer to look at the portraits and to see their representations with further interpretive material. In chronological order, the portraits are of Marie-Louise Lekumberry, created in 2011, and Joan Arrizabalaga, in 2013, both in Reno, Nevada (NV), and, in 2018, Ana Mari Arbillaga in Elko, NV, and my cousin Janine Araneta, from Bakersfield, California, on her visit to me in Reno.

3 The account is based on my personal notes documenting the process of portrait painting and the moments spent together with the individuals who posed for me. Although the information about the individuals was later double-checked with them directly, the perspectives on the anecdotes recounted in this article are exclusively mine – and only I can be held accountable for them.

Marie-Louise Lekumberry

I met Marie-Louise Lekumberry in 2011, about a month after moving to Reno to start my new job as professor at the Center for Basque Studies of the University of Nevada Reno. It was during the annual so-called Basque picnic in Gardnerville, NV, which I attended with colleagues. The picnic took place in a public park where members of the local Basque club grilled meat and sat down to eat with friends and families come from other parts of the American West. As it got dark, people moved into the nearby community hall for a concert by Amuma Says No, a Basque rock band from Boise, Idaho, and Urko Menaia, a musician from San Sebastian-Donostia who was touring some of the US's Euskal Etxeak with the help of the North American Basque Organization (NABO). Those who wanted to have dinner then gathered next door at the JT Basque Bar and Dining Room. From the outside, JT looks like a typical end-of-the-nineteenth century Western saloon, with a white-washed colonnaded front where cowboys could once tie their horses. Inside, I was impressed to see the familiar Basque décor and hear so much Basque being spoken; it was like being back in the Basque Country at a village festivity.

Looking at the pictures on the wall, I realized that the owners, the Lekumberry family, originally came from Ortzaize where, as a student in the late 1990s, I had done anthropological fieldwork and lived with a family with the same name in their farm, Indarborda, up in the mountain. As I was to discover, when Marie-Louise Lekumberry, dressed in her working uniform of white shirt and black dress, came to our table to greet us, the family of Indarborda were her first cousins. I was moved to learn that her father Jean was the brother of Battita, the old man whom I remembered sitting by the hearth in Indarborda's kitchen just fifteen years earlier. Marie-Louise explained that Battita had gone to the US together with Jean and another brother, Piarres. They first worked in sheepherding and then Jean and Piarres bought the JT from another French Basque family. Battita and Piarres eventually returned home, while Jean, who had married a local woman, stayed on. When Jean passed away in 1993, Marie-Louise took on ownership of the JT with her brother Jean-Baptiste.

Marie-Louise agreed to make the one-hour journey from Gardnerville a couple of times a week to pose in my studio at home. I was interested in knowing more about her family, and so she brought some old photographs for me to look at, including of her father Jean. Marie-Louise was born in Nevada. Her mother Shirley is American, not of Basque descent. Marie-Louise and her brothers grew up in close contact with ranching and the outback of Nevada and nearby California, which Jean knew well from his sheepherder days. They were familiar with the places that Jean had roamed with the sheep and where he had carved his name on the aspen trees, like so many other lone Basque sheepherders. When Jean bought the JT, he continued its tradition

Figure 2: Painting the big portrait of Marie-Louise Lekumberry. Photograph by Zoe Bray.

as a gathering place for the local Basque community and lodging for many single and retired sheepherders. Growing up, Marie-Louise often helped out serving the customers. When she and her brother decided to continue running the restaurant after their father passed away, she said she was aware that they were handling an important part of the local Basque heritage; the restaurant played a crucial role in the community, not just as a social place to gather, but as a beacon of their identity. For many years, they continued to provide a home to those sheepherders who had not settled with a family or returned to the Basque Country.

Marie-Louise and I decided to include Jean in the portrait. From the photographs Marie-Louise had brought, I could get a sense of what a jovial character Jean must have been. He is grinning, with a smile that is very evocative of the Basque humor with which I am familiar, especially with older people in the rural hinterland of Iparralde (northern, French side, of the Basque Country), teasing in a friendly, good-natured, way. As Marie-Louise recounted amusing anecdotes about the American Basques, I could see that she had inherited this sense of humor and playfulness.

After trying out different poses, we agreed that Marie-Louise would stand for the portrait, and it was interesting for me to note that her casual wear was a clearly American Western one: rancher boots and bootleg jeans, with her personal touch of a floral top and light shawl.

"Marie-Louise Lekumberry and her father Jean", oil on canvas, 48x60 inches, 2012.

Marie-Louise and I always spoke in English, although Marie-Louise has a good knowledge of French and Basque, having picked up these languages from her father and from regular visits to family and friends back in the Basque Country. English is her mother tongue, and also the main language that she spoke with her father. In the late 1980s, as a student at the University of Nevada Reno, Marie-Louise spent a year in Donostia and studied Basque thanks to the Reno-based University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) (it turns out founded and run by Carmelo Urza – also a second generation Basque American living in Reno). [See Figure 3]

Joan Arrizabalaga

When I told locals in Reno that I worked at the Center for Basque Studies, I was often asked if I had met the locally famous artist Joan Arrizabalaga, noting "I think she's Basque" and "she has an awesome surname!" I finally did meet Joan at a neighborhood fête in the spring of 2012. We then regularly bumped into each other at local art events. I asked her if she would pose for me and we agreed to meet at her home.

I found Joan's house, an old building for Reno dating from 1902, filled with artwork, hers and that of her many artist friends. They adorned every bit of space, from the walls and the furniture to the ceilings, where she had even painted her own fresco decorations in the style of Venetian palazzos. There were no traditional Basque decorations or references to the Basque Country that I could see. In the living room, she also had parts of the walls covered with signed photographs of celebrities, some with personal notes to her. They were all people she had worked with during her time as wardrobe master for Harrah's Casino, which was the center of high-class entertainment in Reno up until the first years of the 21st century – and where Joan collected discarded objects such as fabric from old gaming tables, dices, cards and slot machines for her sculptures.

We set up the big portrait in her living room, sitting in front of some of her large wildlife sculptures hanging on the wall. As we worked, we chatted, usually about art. She was interested to hear about the research I was doing at the time on art and politics in the Basque Country. Joan studied Fine Arts at the University of Nevada Reno and, in the 1970s, went to live in London with her two children for three years. There, she worked in a vintage clothing store off the King's Road. A few years later, her children now grown up and out of the house, Joan went to Florence for some months to learn Italian and immerse herself in the city's art history. During occasional visits to Europe, the Basque Country wasn't a destination. After divorcing, Joan chose to keep her 'maiden' name, not a usual thing to do at the time; "I love the sound of it!" Joan once said to me. We got together some times to sketch. I had recently given birth to my first child, and we used him as our model. Another time, Joan took out an old

Figure 4: Painting Joan Arrizabalaga in her home in Reno, Nevada, USA, 2012. Photograph by Christian Thauer.

model skeleton she kept in a closet. We propped it up in the middle of her sitting room and stood around it with our easels.

Joan's Basque connections were just a small subject of our conversations. Joan was born in Ely, Nevada, and grew up in Fallon, a small desert town close to Reno. It was her father, Ramón Arrizabalaga Erquiaga, who was Basque. His parents had come from somewhere in the rural parts of Araba to find work in the USA. They first worked in sheep camps, including near Austin, Nevada, which is where Ramón was born. His parents then moved to Fallon where they opened the Grand Hotel, which served also as Basque boarding house. Ramón married a local woman of Irish origin, and so Joan and her brother, also called Ramón, were born. Joan recalls visiting her grandparents in their hotel, where she heard many people speaking Basque. Her father however spoke Spanish - rather than Basque - with his parents, and English with Joan and her brother, which means that this is Joan's first and main language. Her father didn't continue with the hotel, which closed after her grandparents retired. It now no longer exists, like so many Basque hotels in the area.

Figure 5: "Joan Arrizabalaga", oil on canvas, 36x48 inches, 2012

Ana Mari Arbillaga

At the end of January 2018, I flew from my current home in Jerusalem and drove the 470 kilometers East into the heart of Nevada to take part in the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko. The idea of my participation was to give a public demonstration of my portrait-drawing, and invite the public to witness and comment on the process, as I had done on other occasions in different institutional settings.[4] This was also a pretext to reach out to the Basque community in Elko and find some members willing to pose for me. From abroad, Meg Glaser, the Western Folklife Center's artistic director in Elko, put me in touch with a few local members of the Basque community. One of these was Zach Arbillaga, who suggested that I draw his grandmother Ana Mari Arbillaga (maiden name Ozamiz Alberdi). We arranged by email to meet the first morning of the Gathering for our first portrait session at my assigned spot in the Conference center. Ana Mari was already there when I arrived, coolly taking in the surrounding bustle and waiting for me to set up, "My grandson told me to come, I don't know what this is about, but here I am". I explained to her what we would be doing, how it was important that we find her a comfortable seat so she could feel at ease for the next two hours that I would be drawing her portrait. Swiftly we were in our positions and the first marks on the canvas made. Ana Mari was fine with not moving for over two hours, even when I offered to take breaks. She said she was used to it, now that she was retired.

For the most part, Ana Mari and I spoke to each other in English, although we also had exchanges in Basque and Spanish, which she still spoke fluently. She told me about how she came to live in Elko: via San Francisco, where she had been for about a year after arriving from the Basque Country. She had been able to leave her hometown of Arteaga, in Bizkaia, after working as a seamstress for the Spanish embassy in Madrid. In 1960, her aunt was visiting the Basque Country from California where she had immigrated to many years before. While her aunt was visiting, Ana Mari's mother got sick and died. Her aunt offered to bring Ana Mari back with her to the US. Since both her parents had passed, and her brothers had families and jobs of their own, she decided to go. Thanks to connections with the Spanish embassy, Ana Mari was able to quickly obtain the necessary papers. She moved to Santa Rosa, California and then to San Francisco, continuing work as a seamstress. One day she accompanied a Basque friend to visit Elko. They ate one evening at the Nevada Dinner House, which was then a popular local Basque boarding house. The owner offered her a job as a cook and waitress. As she was not attached to San Francisco, she accepted the job and stayed in Elko. At the Nevada Dinner House, she also met her future husband, Jose

4 For more see Bray (forthcoming).

Figure 6: Drawing Ana Mari Arbillaga, at the Elko Cowboy Poetry Gathering, 2018. Photograph credit Zoe Bray.

Manuel Arbillaga who had come to Elko thirty years earlier to work as a sheepherder from Ortzaize and, having just retired, was now living in the Nevada Dinner House. They had two sons together. Ana Mari continued working at the Nevada Dinner House until 2001. Then she worked at another local Basque restaurant, the Biltoki, before retiring ten years later. Jose Manuel passed away in 1990, and Ana Mari never re-married. She regularly returns to "the old country", where she has many relatives, especially in Bizkaia.

We worked on Ana Mari's portrait for a couple of hours every morning for three days. During this time, we had many passing visitors, many of which Ana Mari knew. Zach came over a few times, with his wife and baby. Zach, who works in town for a mining supply business, recently started his own Basque catering company, called Arbillaga Catering, which he devotes to in his free time. He says all the Basque recipes he knows are thanks principally to his grandmother. The important place that Ana Mari has in Zach's life is further confirmed by the huge portrait of her that he shows

Figure 7:
"Ana Mari Arbillaga", charcoal on paper, 36x48 inches, 2018.

me etched on his arm. His sister Tabitha, who also stopped by on her way to work at the school nearby, also sports a tattoo of Ana Mari on her back. I was impressed and exclaimed how touching it must feel to have such love manifested by her grandchildren. She nodded, mentioning that she had looked after them a great deal when they were children.

I gathered more about Ana Mari's local popularity through other passing individuals, including Kiaya Memeo, the other person who posed for me during the Elko Cowboy Gathering. Ana Mari was also one of the creators of the Elko Ariñak Basque Dance group and was its instructor for many years. As an experienced seamstress, she also made the dancers' traditional costumes. She clearly seemed to have been a key bastion of Basque cultural life of Elko.

Janine Araneta

Since moving to Reno, I had renewed contact with the two first cousins of my mother who live in Bakersfield, CA. Until then I had only met them three times in my life: twice I had visited them as a child, and once they had come to the Basque Country. When I returned to Nevada in 2018, Janine Araneta (maiden name Maitia Dendarin), one of the two first cousins, made the trip to visit me, taking advantage of the fact that one of her grandchildren, Madison, was playing softball for San Jose State University against the University of Nevada Reno.

Figure 8: Drawing Janine Araneta in my home in Reno. Photograph credit Zoe Bray.

Janine came with a collection of old photographs of the family, and together we traced back and exchanged different pieces of information that helped add some missing links to the puzzles that we each had about our family. Until then, my main knowledge of Janine's side of the family came from my mother, and now I could hear the story of emigration directly from Janine. It was her mother Jeanne (the sister of my grandmother Marie), who wanted to go live in the US, where her husband Raymond Maitia had already been working in Bakersfield, at the Basque Café run by his brother Frank. They had been living comfortably in Bayonne, where Jeanne ran a creamery just by the market. They left for the US in 1957, when Janine and her sister Maddy were children. At this time, Bakersfield had a large Basque community. When not in school, where Janine and Maddy quickly learnt English, they worked at the Wool Growers restaurant, which was owned by their father's brother's family. The Wool Growers is still a popular Basque eating and meeting place, one of the few that still exist in Bakersfield, and run by Janine's cousins. As soon as Janine had graduated from high school, she also worked at the Bank of America, which needed help to communicate with all the Basque customers which the bank was getting who couldn't speak English.

Janine married a local American, not of Basque origin, and had three sons, Bobby, Jimmy and Danny, and continued to work as an accountant for the bank. Meanwhile her sister Maddy married a local Basque, Arnaud Arrayet, also originally come from Iparralde to work as a sheepherder, and they started their own landscaping and yard work business, which had become a new business venture for many Basques in the area. While Maddy continued to speak Basque with Arnaud at home and with their children Josette and Raymond, Janine, with her American husband, shifted to English, which means that her children have English as their first language. Maddy nonetheless made sure that all her sons took part in Basque dancing and pelota, two key activities for children at the local Basque club.

After Janine divorced, she moved to Chino with her children and continued working as an accountant, and being part of Chino's equally strong Basque community. She met Joxe Araneta who had also moved from the old country, from the small mountain village of Irurita, on the southern, Spanish side (Hegoalde), initially to work as a sheepherder. Janine and Joxe married and moved to Bakersfield again, where Janine resumed working at the Wool Growers, and Joxe took on a job as truck driver, transporting sheep from one feeding area and ranch to another.

Figure 9:
"Janine Araneta", charcoal on paper, 36x48 inches, 2018.]

With my parents and two siblings, we visited Janine and Maddy and their parents in the late 1980s. As a child, this was a thrilling time – going to 'America', the land of modernity and everything big and shiny. Janine's son Bobby drove us with his girlfriend to a baseball pitch to introduce us to the game. We also enjoyed big Basque family-style lunches at the Wool Growers and at Maddy's home which I also re-call decorated with traditional Basque objects and images.

I returned alone to visit Maddy and Janine in my late teens. Janine took me to the shopping mall to buy me Levi's jeans, knowing that these were coveted back in Europe. Another memorable moment was accompanying Joxe in his truck on one of his long trips carrying sheep. We left Bakersfield at night, and when I woke up from my bunk bed in the truck, we were in the middle of the Nevadan outback, and Joxe was sitting on the ground with three other men enjoying a breakfast of homemade bread and cheese. One of the men wore a beret, the others American trucker-style caps, all of them were chatting in Basque, and grinning at me as I emerged blinking into the bright desert sun.

Joxe passed away a few years later, and, when I returned to the US, this time as professor at the Center for Basque Studies, Janine was living next to her son Bobby who now runs a popular baseball school in Bakersfield. The possibility of drawing her portrait came during Janine's visit to Reno on the occasion of her granddaughter's softball competition. Janine stayed at my home, and one day that Madison's match was cancelled because of the rain, we set up in my studio and continued our lively chatting while working on a drawing of her.

CONCLUSION

My approach in painting these individuals of Basque descent in the American West has been to consciously not place a conventional Basque narrative on them, but rather to paint some of the personal, private Basqueness of the people that cannot be seen. This is an experiment with alternative ways of depicting identity, which by definition does not only seek to be an inquiry of how things are, but inevitably also seeks to exert constructing influence on identity formulation itself.

Each of us cultivates our identity in ways that meet our personal needs. While some people might be inclined to give importance to some aspect of their family, others might want to ignore them, desirous of something new and more fitting to their individual experience. My ethnographic encounters via the portraits revealed the generational differences in the Basque American diaspora and how they have very different and personal ways of identifying themselves as Basque. Thus the portraits

represent Basqueness beyond "stereotypes" (Etulain and Echeverria 1999: XIV). All together, I hope that my painted portraits can help to further render the plural picture of the Basque diaspora and invite us to reflect on how it is and can be further represented in the 21st century.

Portraiture is an opportunity for slow thinking and slow seeing. It facilitates contemplation of the other and of the self, and by extension reflection on the intersubjectivity of identity and the subtleties of human existence. It can furthermore do this in a way that does not presume isolation and disconnection from the outside. On the contrary, in the spirit of José Miguel de Barandiaran (Barandiarán 2009), ethnographic portrait painting today necessitates and can facilitate also the pondering and dwelling of our holistic place and relationship with our social, political and natural environment. Today, when academic research finally takes on a decolonial (Allen and Jobson 2016) and multimodal turn (Collins et al. 2017) any serious study of the Basque diaspora cannot ignore the larger more complex picture.[5] Feminist re-readings of established representations of Basque culture and identity have thankfully already taken place (eg Del Valle 1997; Totoricaguena 2000; Bullen 2003). The decolonial and multimodal turns could finally reveal more of the Basque diaspora's complexity.

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5 See also for instance the Opening Plenary of the conference on Art, Materiality and Representation of the Royal Anthropological Institute, in which I presented: https://vimeo.com/274485439

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