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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

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A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Katherine Peña

Committee in charge:

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair
Professor Marc Alexander Barricelli
Professor Stephen W Buescher
Professor Shahrokh D Yadegari

2024

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The Thesis of Katherine Peña is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Katherine Peña

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair

I am a vessel for stories of immigrants, essential workers, a neglected project building in the now gentrified lower east side, a family sticking together through the forgetful mind of their matriarch. I am the stories my grandmother can no longer remember to tell.

These are the words I wrote in my artist statement to get into grad school. What a full circle moment to end it on playing the role of Gilda, a woman whose mind, like the colors of a bright tree fading, turns to dust.

For three years, I've chipped away at a wall that kept me from stretching miles and miles beyond what I was told to be my limit. If it weren't for the tools I received in my classes, I wouldn't have been able to do justice to the characters I embodied. For Gilda in our production of X, I was able to summon what I learned in the basement of Galbraith Hall. I learned how to move my body in all the major and minor ways so that my physicality was clear. I learned how to properly warm up my voice so everything I did with it was sustainable. I learned how using "living thought" would allow me to be present in moments where my character's mind was worlds away. My capabilities continue to bloom and I am calm and confident with the tools I've been given to honor more characters waiting by the ghost light.