

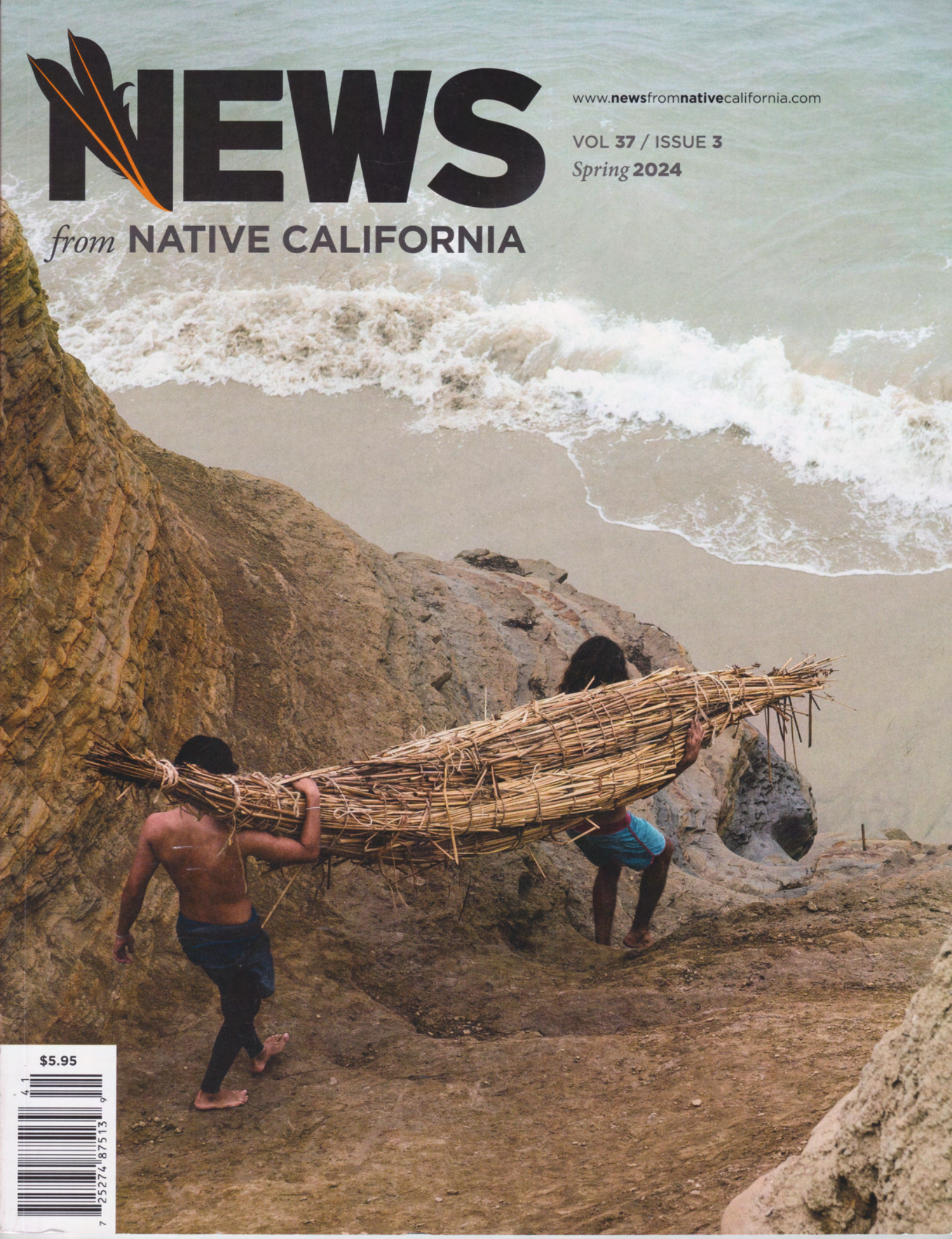
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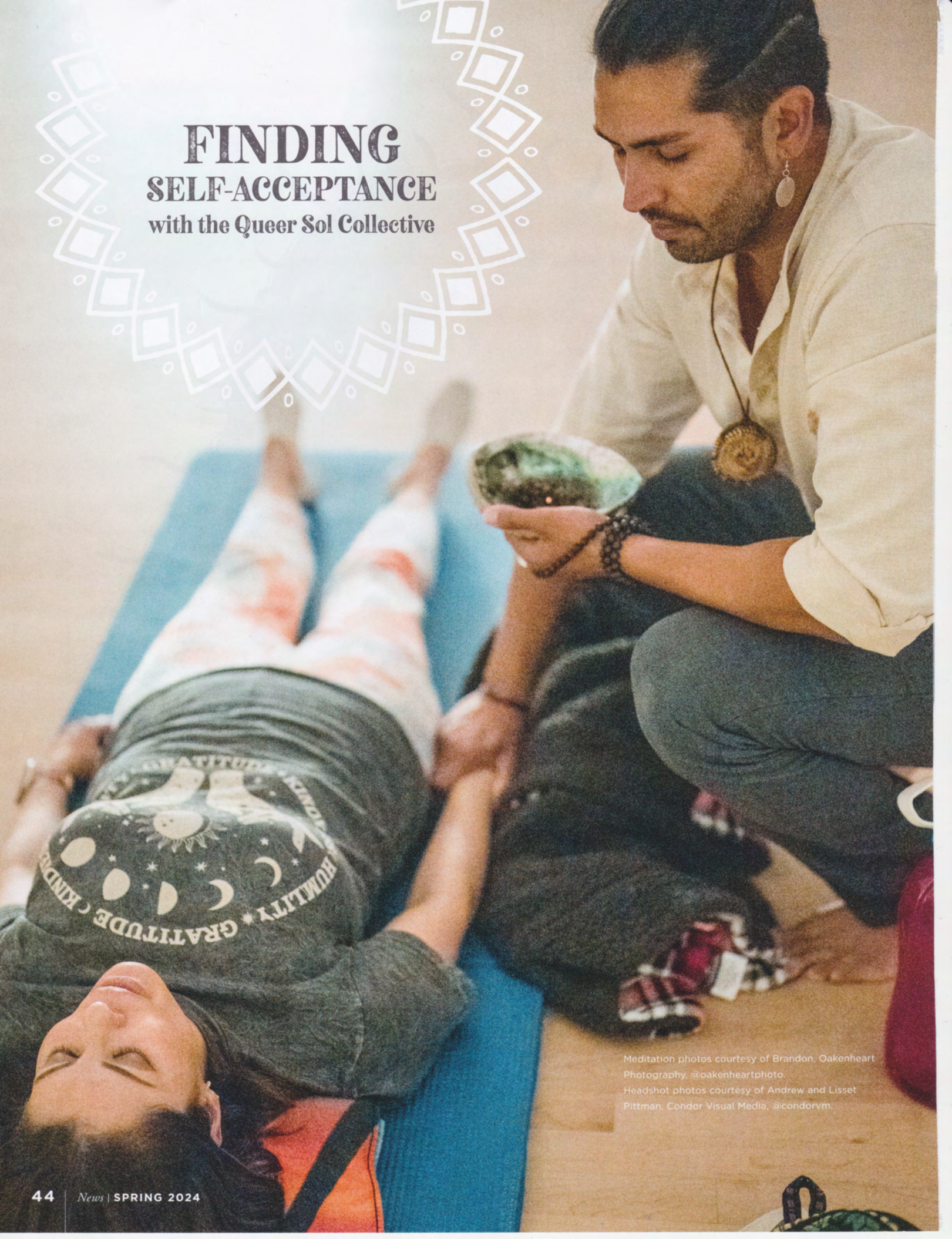


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FINDING SELF-ACCEPTANCE

with the Queer Sol Collective



Meditation photos courtesy of Brandon, Oakenheart Photography, @oakenheartphoto.
Headshot photos courtesy of Andrew and Lisset Pittman, Condor Visual Media, @condorvm.

THE QUEER SOL COLLECTIVE

MEET THE FOUNDERS



JUAN ANGEL
REYNOSO



HUDSON
GARCIA



by
Jeanne
Ferris

BEING FREE AND EQUAL IN DIGNITY IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT that applies to all religions, genders, and races.

No geopolitical borders, government, or church may dictate to those living outside the lines of commonly accepted roles.

Ever.

Unfortunately, this concept has been an ideal only sometimes practiced and often dismissed.

The Queer SOL Collective (QSC) is a registered nonprofit at the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians Reservation that offers a place of refuge for 2SLGBTQ+ citizens seeking self-acceptance and a society free from prejudice and trauma. Traditionally, Native American two-spirit (2S) people were male, female, and sometimes intersex individuals. In most tribes, they were considered neither men nor women. They maintained an alternative gender status.

Juan Angel Reynoso (2S Ipai Hellyaa) co-founded QSC with Hudson Garcia (2S Quimbaya descendant from the Cauca Valley of present-day Colombia) on tribal land that Juan inherited from his grandmother. I talked with Juan and Hudson about why they founded QSC and what it offers to community members.

How did your childhood inform your life choices?

Juan: “I grew up feeling accepted and loved, especially by my grandmother. I thought creating a sacred space honors who she was—a strong, practical leader who always spoke her mind. Although there are a few extended members of my family who still refused to speak to me when I came out.”

Juan serves as the only Pauma Valley Center High School district specialist skilled in American Sign Language, interpreting with a focus on empathic communications and trauma response.

Hudson: “I grew up in New York City as a hostage to trafficking with a violent and drug-using father. Survival taught me how to fight, so when I was bullied for being queer, that was secondary to the trauma my mother and I endured. Fighting was second nature already. Juan was always in my social orbit for about a year before we came up with the idea of QSC.”

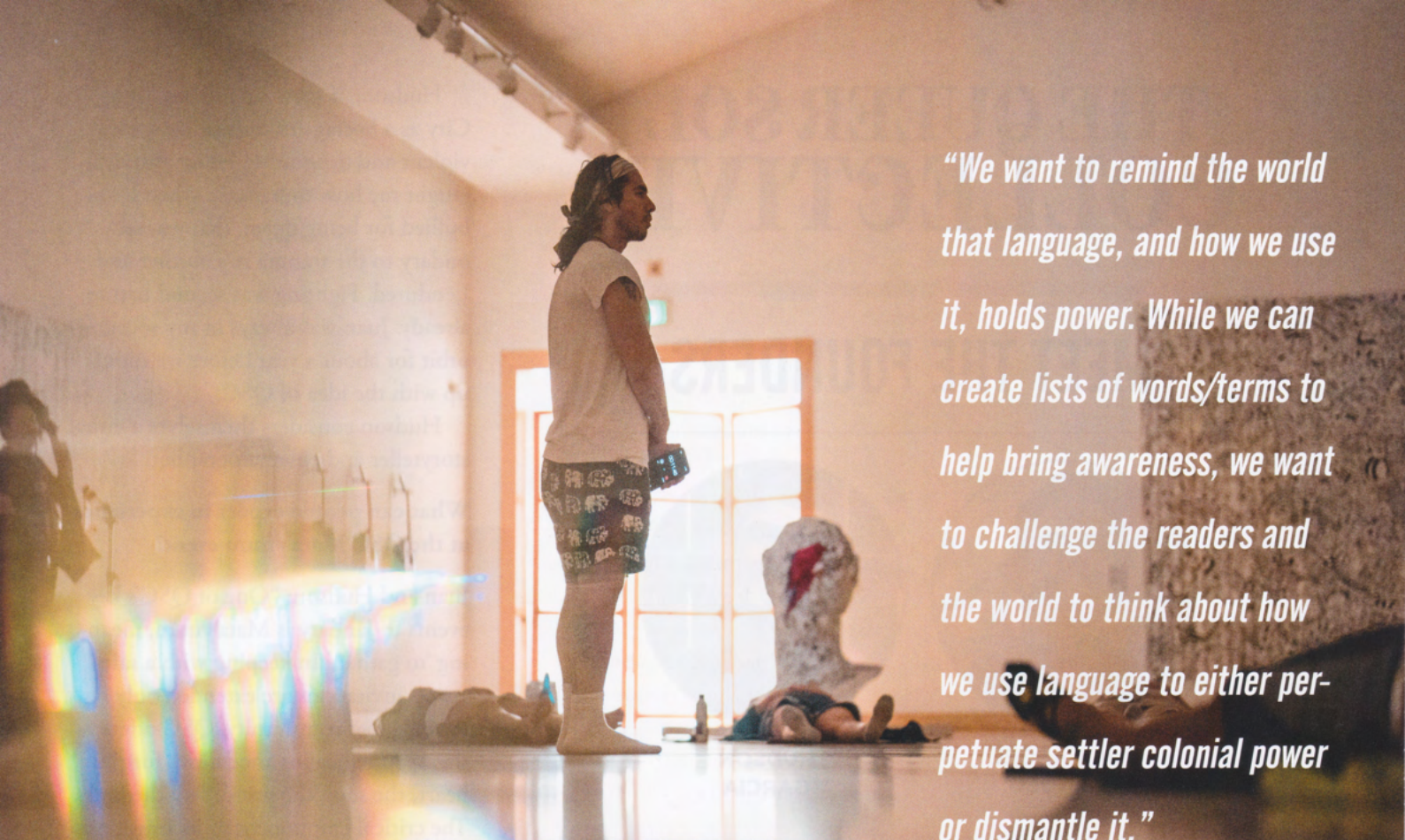
Hudson considers themselves a visual storyteller and cinematographer.

What can people expect to experience at the QSC Mata’yuum event?

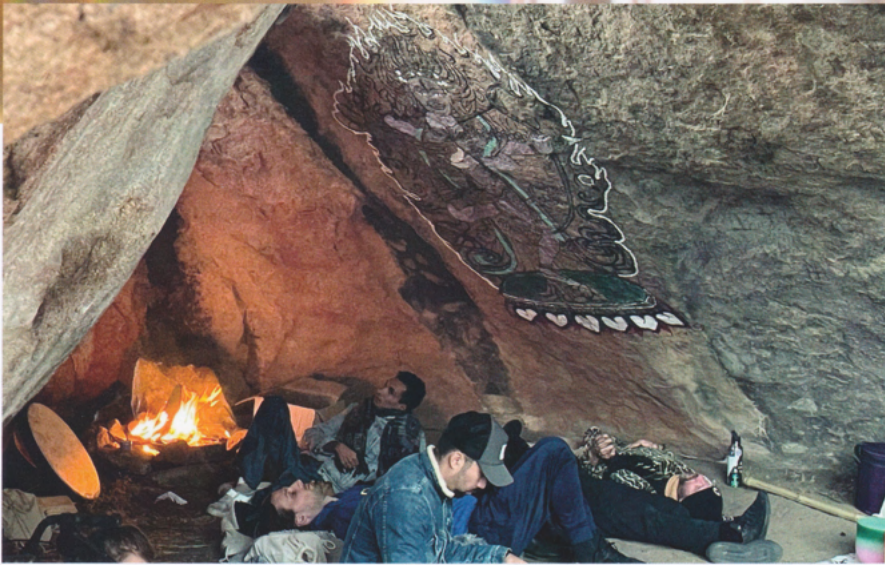
Juan and Hudson: “One of QSC’s key events in January is Mata’yuum, meaning ‘to gather.’ In keeping with a safe space, invitations are extended only to the queer community. QSC offers therapeutic healing modalities for the heart, the soul, the mind, and the body. The critical component of its mission is a ‘land-based curriculum’ with ‘Indigenous pedagogical methodologies.’”

Juan: “One of our more mainstream events was sponsored by the California Center for the Arts, Escondido Foundation. It was a [yoga/breathwork] workshop series from July through September. This particular series brought a diverse background of community members together for a morning of wellness and restoration.”

More than ever, language usage is at the forefront of every academic environment. For example, the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill recently passed in Florida and has received national backlash from all sectors. The following is an excerpt from Meredith Johnson’s article in *The Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law*, “The Dangerous Implications of the Bill on LGBTQ Youth in Florida”: “The Bill could severely impact the mental health of LGBTQ+ students in Florida. Amir Paley, CEO of the Trevor Project, an LGBTQ+ youth suicide and crisis prevention organization, said that ‘when lawmakers treat LGBTQ+ topics



“We want to remind the world that language, and how we use it, holds power. While we can create lists of words/terms to help bring awareness, we want to challenge the readers and the world to think about how we use language to either perpetuate settler colonial power or dismantle it.”



as taboo...it only adds to the existing stigma and discrimination, which puts LGBTQ+ young people at greater risk for bullying, depression, and suicide.’ LGBTQ+ youth are already at a higher than average risk of suicide and self-harm, as a survey found that 42% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered suicide in 2021. The bias, discrimination, and family rejection that many LGBTQ+ youth must deal with are potential factors that contribute to this higher rate of suicide. This Bill transforms classrooms into unsafe spaces for LGBTQ+ students, where they must hide their sexuality, which can exacerbate the issues that these students are already facing.”

Native American tribes are historically progressive and intuitive in their worldview and governance. Case in point: the Lipay Nation of Santa Ysabel

was the first California tribe, in June 2013, to declare same-sex marriage legal. The Blue Lake Rancheria of the Wiyot, Yurok, and Hoopa Valley tribes also allow same-sex unions.

What are acceptable terms for Queer communities?

Juan: "Our identities are intersectional, just like our readers and the world. What might be appropriate for one person may not be for another. For example, as members of the Queer community, we may have reclaimed what was once a derogatory term used against us to harm us, as an act of resistance and reclamation. The following examples of how language is hurtful to the queer community are *homo*, *fairy*, *fruitcake*, *fag*, *faggot*, *tranny*, *transvestite*, *transsexual*, and *pansy*."

Hudson: "Acceptable terms are *Ipai* (ee-pye) *hellyaa* (shlaa), *2Spirit* (a pan-Indigenous term used 'exclusively' to identify Queer Indigenous folx), *Queer*, *lesbian*, *WLW* (women loving women), *gay*, *bisexual*, *bi*, *transgender*, *intersex*, *asexual*, *pansexual*, *nonbinary*, *gender non-conforming*, *genderfluid*, *gender-queer*."

Juan: "We want to remind the world that language, and how we use it, holds power. While we can create lists of words/terms to help bring awareness, we want to challenge the readers and the world to think about how we use language to either perpetuate settler colonial power or dismantle it (decolonize). Indigenous/2Spirit/Queer relatives have existed since time immemorial (Creation). It is our responsibility to speak up or challenge our perceptions of gender as it pertains to colonial constructs of gender and social roles. For example, phrases like 'hit like a man' and 'you hit like a girl,' 'man up,' 'that's a girl's toy,' 'boy/girls don't wear that,' 'stop crying' ([and] any other phrases/statements that perpetuate the gender binary) only further seek to support the erasure of 2Spirit/Queer people. They place people in binary

boxes, completely overlooking the spectrum of gender and identities that encompass it."

The following statements are testimonials from those who attended the Mata'yuum event. For privacy, last names were withheld.

I went to Queer Sol with resistance in an effort to support my partner. Little did I know Queer Sol was exactly what I needed. The workshops and facilitators taught me skills that I'm excited to take into the real world. I was able to let go of resentments I have held onto and feel a deeper and more vulnerable connection with myself and with my partner. Juan and Hudson care deeply about the community they are building and it shows by the effort and care they put into these retreats. I couldn't be more thankful for this heart and mind evolving experience.

—McKay

Before Queer SOL, I felt lost; now, I am one of the "Lost Boys." I felt mute and numb; now, I redefined my powerful voice. I felt resentful and misunderstood in my relationship; now, we have a deeply growth-oriented and vulnerably connected partnership. I felt disconnected and stressed; now I feel rooted and interwoven with my flavorful chosen siblings. Thank you for storytelling love, rage, and wisdom through this powerful retreat.

—Andrew

The spaces that the Queer Sol Collective (QSC) have offered have allowed me to witness many expressions of queer love, joy, and support but also queer pain, sorrow, and rage. There is a tangible love that the QSC has weaved within and around their events that made this

possible. The work they do has created many opportunities for me to learn/heal by opening my ears and opening my heart around individual connections, group conversations, and inner self-reflection.

—Ray

The Queer SOL Collective looks forward to an inclusive and diverse future with plans of assisting with "Right to Life housing, establishing food cultivation and medicinal farming to achieve re-Indigenization and true sovereignty, which contributes to the components of whole person health."

If you are in crisis, the Trevor Project can provide confidential support for LGBTQ youth, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Please call the Trevor Lifeline at (866) 488-7386 or dial 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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