

CFAR's *Papers on Power* is a series of commissioned essays for which artists, writers, activists, and cultural producers have been asked to respond to the question "What is power?" in whatever form best relates to their work and thinking.

THE CRAZY PINEAPPLE

NICK TOBIER

La Pina Casual (LPC)

Fill the bottom of a cup with cut up pineapple.
 Add mango chunks.
 2 scoops pineapple ice cream.
 More pineapple
 Mango ice cream
 Chamoy*

Add a tamarind stick, a pineapple lollipop, and sour gummi peach rings. Top with a sprinkle of tajin** and a squeeze of fresh lime.

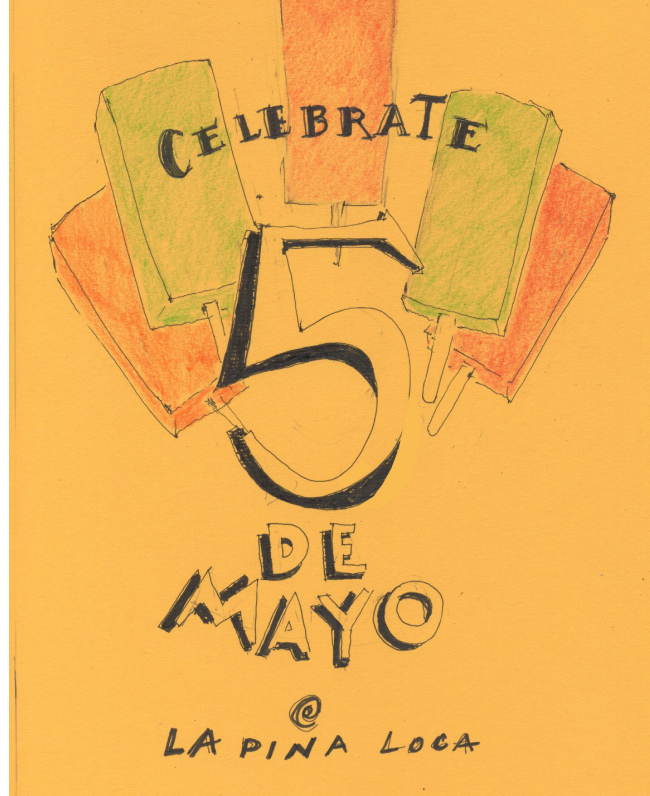
LPC is delicious—an unexpected combination of flavors, textures, colors, and materials. I had the first of many in April 2020 at La Pina Loca (The Crazy Pineapple), a small family run paletteria in a small shopping plaza at an intersection of large roads in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

We had all been living in some form of shutdown—schools, work, indoor dining, empty streets. And here, at the end of a gray winter was this incredible joyous concoction. I tried to draw LPC from memory—as homage and as a way to keep it fresh in mind until I could get back there. I posted a photo of the drawing on social media and tagged some friends in town who I thought would enjoy a treat as well as to support a local business.

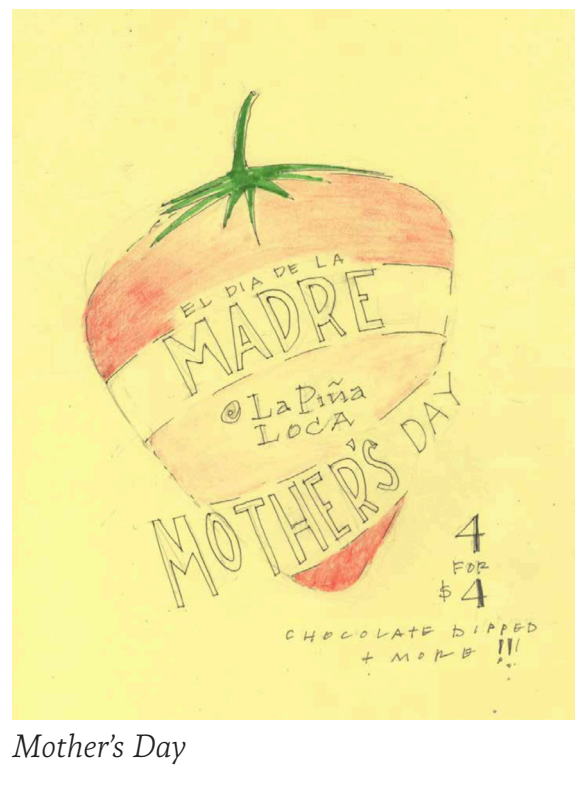
La Pina Loca "liked" the post on Facebook and shared it on their page.



La Pina Casual



Cinco de Mayo



Mother's Day

I did another drawing—Mother's Day was coming up and La Pina had posted on their FB page that they would have flowers for sale along with dipped strawberries. That weekend when I went in, I brought my drawings as some kind of tribute—I felt awkward for sure, not certain if this was the kind of gift you receive and have neither room nor use for.

I kept doing the drawings week after week—each after tasting Fresonadas, Mangonadas, Pina Reynas. Along the way I got to meet Ben and Gloria, the owners and inventors of the desserts. I never introduced myself as a professor, an artist, or even thought, "I've got a project."

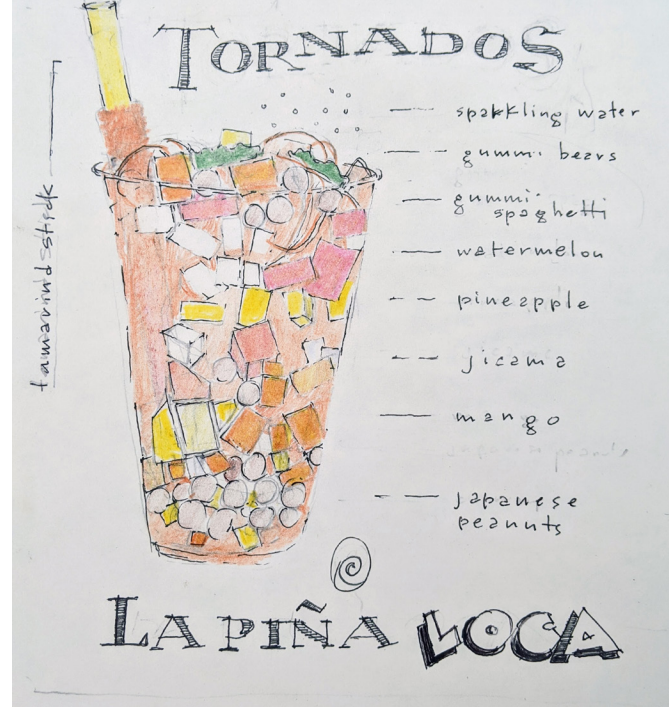
As a professor at a big university in town, I am continually boosted by all manner of megaphones of privilege. I mean, people pay to hear me speak. That is just craziness. The university structure makes sure that your every accomplishment is noted and promoted. Combine that sense of importance with the fluidity of pursuing interests for creative inquiry, shifting contexts and entering communities, and I take up a lot of space with my assumptions of power and the privileges afforded to my phenotype (Caucasian) passing through the world. This cause and effect reminds me of a Tornado—both the weather form and La Pina Loca's assembly (gummi spaghetti, Japanese peanuts, and gummi bears set in a swirl of sparkling water and fresh mango).

In WA Sutton's 1967 book "Travel & Understanding: Notes on the Social Structure of Touring" the dynamics of the guest-host relationship is like tourist-local characterized as "visitors who are on the move to enjoy themselves... and hosts who are relatively stationary and who have the function of catering to these visitors' needs and wishes." The encounters are essentially transitory, non-repetitive, and asymmetrical; the participants are oriented toward achieving immediate gratification rather than toward maintaining a continuous relationship, and so do not have to take account of the effects their present actions will have on the relationship in the future; hence, there is neither a fellowship nor an opportunity to create mutual trust. Guests, like Sutton's tourists, are transient, but our consideration of them is both personal and ethical as how we welcome strangers, immigrants, and refugees. La Pina welcomed me into its presence just as it does any other customer.

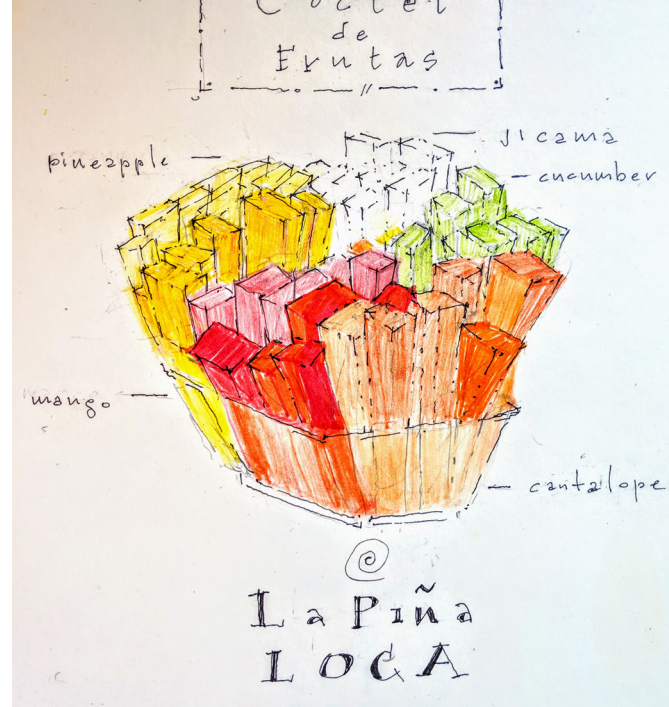
"Negotiations are contingent upon both participants having this understanding and a mutual confidence." APG (Artist Placement Group) Manifesto, 1980

The APG model—to integrate artists into businesses and corporations in Britain in the late 1960's proposed a structural challenge to the modus operandi at an institutional level, where the artist was a negotiated presence rather than existing in his or her own realm (studio, museum, school). Today's social practice artists (where I locate my own practice) in most scenarios attempt some of the same rhetoric I use for myself or for exhibition and conference proposals, which is that my projects use art as a catalyst for interaction and cooperation.

We live and work in unequal access to privilege and discourse, and that all too often the encounters with difference (responses, populations) trades on the charge of this disparate relationship between contextual backdrop and project. I am often aware that these arrangements are frequently circumscribed and are most precarious where the power dynamic is asymmetrical. Giving up this power is what Jacques Derrida would characterize as going from ownership and a position of power to giving ownership away and becoming vulnerable. As artist-guests, what are our roles? I would like to suggest that one could be a willingness to disrupt our habits of assumption of power and to be willing to contend with the intricacies—of misunderstanding, of disinterest, loss of power and privilege, or vulnerability.



Tornados



Coctel de Frutas

"In order to progress, people have to work together; and in the course of their collaboration, they gradually see an identification in their relationships whose initial diversity was precisely what made their collaboration fruitful and necessary." Claude Lévi-Strauss

Imagine if (allegedly) powerful guests adapted to local manners. Where would our lives be? Frequently, assimilation is the model for the good guest and we could indicate scores of relationships between artists and larger communities that are categorically well mannered. Critic Steven Wright cautions against easy assimilation: "How and why and under what circumstances we collaborate is fruitful because there is an initial difference." In this instance at La Pina, where hierarchies and roles shift between host and guest, the relationship is its most dynamic and has the greatest chance of producing new forms and, along with it, an embrace of a certain messiness of human relations.

The negotiation of my presence in someone else's territory is one of the key components of my work, where I interject content as a guest. Beginning with this first layer of communication, participation with me the artist as a guest starts right away. I admire your work—this is mine, and then, maybe later, much later, can we do something together, not because of the assumption of power, but because we have grown to trust and enjoy one another?

Ben wrote me one Saturday and asked if I would be coming into La Pina because he had something for me. There on the wall above the hand sanitizer right by the front door were all of the drawings. La Pina Casual, the dessert that became the drawing, was now on the back of the staff t-shirts. A few months later, when the shop closed for two weeks of renovations, the drawings had been framed.

It is winter now and there is a whole new menu of items to try at La Pina. If you are in Ann Arbor, let me know—I can meet you over there, my treat. If you like, we can call it The Crazy Pineapple Residency.



Exhibition View

Notes:

* Chamoy is a condiment from Mexico that is typically served as a dip for fresh fruit. It is made with fruit, such as apricot, mango or plum, with apricot lime juice. You can buy it bottled in varying degrees of spiciness or you can make it at home with apricot jam, lime juice and chile peppers.

** Tajin is a seasoning mix of dried and ground red chilies, sea salt, dehydrated lime juice.

Biography:

Nick Tobier, co-founder of the Brightmoor Maker Space in Detroit, is a libra, a defender for the recently promoted 4th division Penguins soccer team, and a designer of projects in public places taking form in built structures and events from bus stops to kiosks and boulevards. Recent places include Medellin, Colombia; Cholula, Mexico; Ishinomaki, Japan; Detroit; The Prague Quadrennial; and La Pina Loca in Ann Arbor, MI. Nick studied sculpture and landscape architecture, worked at Storefront for Art and Architecture in NYC and as a designer with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation/ Bronx Division and LandWorks Studio, Boston. He is also Professor at the Stamps School of Art + Design at the University of Michigan.