



Reflections of Reality: An Interview with Andres Alejandro Chavez

By Rose Questel and Carina Hoyer



Rose: Can you introduce yourself to our lovely readers?

Andres: Yes, my name is Andres Alejandro Chavez. I was born in and am originally from Caracas, Venezuela. I moved here to the United States, in Chicago in 2013 to go to school for visual communications, graphic design and photography. I am working on mixing together my previous interests with my newer interest and work in photojournalism. My passion for both communication and photography led me to photojournalism which I feel allows me to inject a “use” to the art that I love with the ultimate goal of giving a voice to those without.

R: What brought you to Albany Park specifically?

A: When I moved to the city, I had absolutely no money and no connection to the city. I moved a couple times, trying to find a neighborhood that is both affordable, close to things, and has a really good community, and eventually ended up here in AP.

R: What first drew you to the Albany Park Free Store? What did that first day look like?

A: My roommate suggested that we should do it. And I said no. But I always say that I’m not going to do something and end up doing it anyway. Haha. So I went to the free store and then it was really easy to get involved.

R: How did you first become interested in photography?

A: In 2010, after the massive earthquake in Haiti. There was a photo of a girl in a red dress, roughly 10 years old who had been killed in the quake. People were trying to take advantage of the situation or taking things out of desperation, not trying to cast judgment on that, but in the photo, people were walking past her with stuff in their hands as she lay on the floor. Then, there was another photo that came alongside that one, that showed the same girl on the ground but with a line of between 11 and 15 photographers that were all taking the same photograph of the girl on the ground and the people looting.

I have always been drawn into those ethical and moral questions about how to tell a story and after seeing that photo, I really wanted to be able to navigate these types of questions myself.

Then I got back into photography about 4 years ago, after a break, focusing mostly on street photography, documenting Chicago, the culture, and things that were happening. During that time, I began documenting the migrant crisis, and while I hate that phrasing, it involved many of my people being here. I would speak to them and then take their photos, in a way that shared their story and humanized them, which is the ultimate goal. Humanizing people and showing that their stories matter. That they matter. That’s what keeps me

A: It’s difficult really. One of my mentors in street photography used to tell me “There are no rules in street photography. You just have to do it.” You basically walk around, take in the space, take in the people. take in the culture, take in the moment. But in journalism, there are very clear rules about ethics and respect for the subject. I always try to show something that feels real. I don’t go for the hyper-curated or for trends, or even necessarily the aesthetically pleasing.

I want to avoid taking a photo of that person, not a photo of that person’s situation which would then be so exploitative, to me. I am looking for a bigger documentation of the zeitgeist, the cultural movement that is happening.



motivated in doing this work. Then right after Israel began their genocidal campaign in Gaza and I started documenting the protests.

R: Do you have a specific artistic practice or process when seeking out a subject or person to cover, like deciding whose stories to tell?

R: Who is the mentor you mentioned earlier?

A: Oh! I have so many mentors, it’s amazing. My main photography mentor is Denise Kind, she studied at the center of

CONTINUED ON
THE BACK→

STATEMENT ON THE CLOSURE OF LEGION PARK

Hi, we are Parks for All. We are a local mutual aid group made up of housed and unhoused neighbors from the Albany Park area, that works to provide support, meet the material needs of and advocate for local encampment residents at their behest and with their guidance. We are not new here. Many of us have grown up and built our lives on the NorthWest side of Chicago. We are your neighbors. Now that the dust has settled and our community

has begun to heal, we want to talk to you about what happened on Tuesday, March 17th 2026.

That day the City of Chicago and the Park District conducted what is now euphemistically referred to under their new policy as an "encampment closure" of the community residing within Legion Park. Despite the rhetorical sanitization, this was a sweep. A sweep is the violent displacement of unhoused community members, without providing housing, scattering them across other parts of the park. By the 17th, none of the residents had been given keys to housing, thus forcing our community members to move elsewhere, further south into a more crowded area of the park system.

Early that frigid morning, Park District managers, security, and CPD created a line, obstructed residents from their belongings and pushed their supporters out. The bulldozer came to throw entire homes and a life's worth of belongings in the garbage as residents watched crying. Despite our best efforts that morning and the days prior, to help protect and move their most important property, in the end we stood together bearing witness to a destruction that if alone, "no one would believe." They took everything, leaving behind only the signs that read "Priority Enforcement Area" to ensure their permanent exclusion from the park.

Yet, while this community was uprooted, their deeper roots to the land here remain untouched. Before this moment of destruction and loss, was a moment of hope, unified solidarity exemplified by our unhoused members who came to advocate for themselves in the halls of power. They sought only to negotiate with city officials in good faith for a more reasonable alternative. Their proposal garnered widespread community support including nearly 30 other respected organizations throughout the city. But, the City, facing homeowner complaints, rebuffed residents' attempts to negotiate, waiting until just 3 days before to even meet with residents. But this was just a show, because their decision had been made and they insisted that the "closure" must go on - in 12 degree weather.

The city and its joint task force agencies then pantomimed the caring provider, leaving our community to mend the wounds of the destruction they caused. We, with the help of our larger network of volunteers, provided residents with two nights of a local warming center that offered a safe place for them to land, regroup, and store some belongings. The city obfuscated and passed the buck to DFSS who only hours earlier had been laughing together with police officers while tossing residents' livelihoods in the dumpster.

Many of the residents in the Legion Park encampment and encampments generally are some of the most vulnerable populations including immigrants and refugees. Their targeting is merely symptomatic of a larger problem. Homelessness now, under fascism, will only increase. Unemployment will rise. Rent will keep going up. Medical debt accumulates. Disasters strike when you least expect it. The needs of the unhoused cannot

continue to be dismissed by so-called progressive lawmakers. Doing so leaves us all exposed and our most vulnerable residents subject to targeted harassment and criminalization from fascists, CPD and ICE which has already occurred and can only be expected to continue. Unless we work collectively to protect each other, no one is safe. Today it's them, but tomorrow it will be you.

We know this act of violence will not stop the complaints from housed neighbors sitting in the comfort of their heated homes. In fact, they and the threats from park security have only gotten worse following the move. Because, their view of the world is compromised by capital and a need for control. Living in the park is a threat.

It is a threat by capital, showing what happens to you if you cannot or will not conform to its demands. And it is a threat to capital. It shows that you can live on the land in nature, without paying in.

Living in proximity to land and nature though means living in proximity to destruction. Exposed to the elements, we must respond to and plan for such destruction. Like a bird

who every spring must rebuild its nest, over and over again, becoming familiar with each component. Every twig. Every branch. This familiarity brings us comfort.

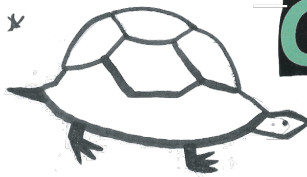
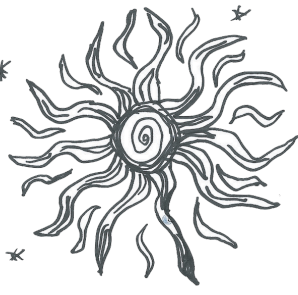
Parks for All is not just a slogan or what we cry out while the system pushes us down. We are a community, all pouring in strength together as we push up with our most vulnerable neighbors in respect for their autonomy and humanity. Hear us when we say we want to collaborate with you. We want your help, to create a better world bit by bit, twig by twig, person by person. Thanks for your time, hope to see you at distro next week!



STOP THE SWEEPS



Classifieds



CONNECTIONZ MISSED

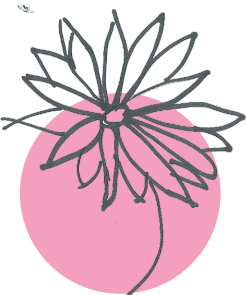


Figure Drawing Collective (Ages 18+)
Grotesque Burlesque
4201 N Ravenswood Unit A105
Wednesdays 7:30-10pm at Hidden Light Tattoo
Suggested donation \$20

From Jess: To my neighbors on Gunnison Ave with the most adorable cats, please find me at the Free Store. It is absolutely crucial that I know your name. I am obsessed with your cat. I want to give it a treat. Please.

To whoever made the Cinnamaroll sticker that says "Fuck Ice" on Sacramento: who are you? I need to collab with you on some stickers, and please make more!

Community space at 3000 W Lawrence now available for hosting Birthday Parties by ducksfloat collective.
Choose your own adventure! Email ducksfloat@proton.me to get a quote!

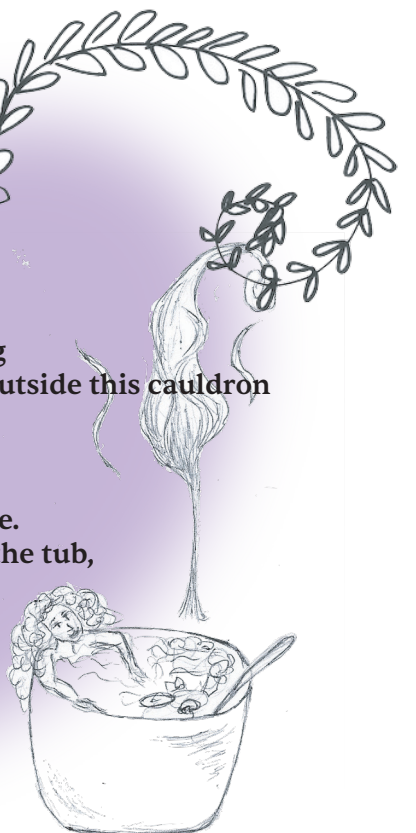


Emergency Family Planning limited legal services, including emergency guardianship petitions and assistance developing a family plan in the event of an emergency. Send inquiries to apmutualaid@gmail.com.

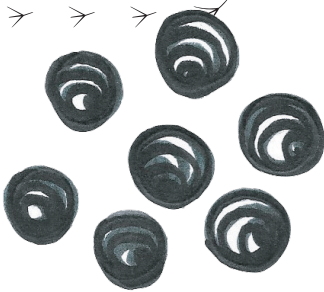
Naked lady soup
They boil together
Chit-chatting, relaxing, forgetting
Forgetting the woes of their life outside this cauldron

The chef turns the knob,
the fire on the burner grows,
turning a bright blue almost white.
The naked ladies slide deeper in the tub,
water lapping up their necks and
burning their faces.
Faces that look pleased, at peace.
They'll rest a while longer there.

Anna Questel



Free After School Program
Mayfair Presbyterian Church
Thursdays 3pm-5pm



photojournalism at Chicago. An in-fuckin-credible street photographer. And then Raven Geary, from Unravelled,. Lauren Miranda, a professor at NEIU right here on Foster, was my visual arts/graphic design mentor, who taught me how to communicate through image. I would claim those three as my main mentors.

Carina: I did want to specifically know about other artistic inspirations do you have?

A: As a visual artist, truly anything is inspiration. Like movies. When you watch a movie, you can start deconstructing everything. Concepts, visual elements, everything or anything can be inspiration. You can steal the parts that give inspiration from anything, you can steal the tone in a scene from a movie, a color palette from a particular painter or a viewpoint in a photo from a photographer.

R: How does looking for that subject change when you are doing street photography or journalism?

A: When I am doing journalism, I do have to think - if you see this photo without context, is it hiding something? Can this photo be used to tell the opposite side of what I am trying to tell? Those are the considerations that I have to take. I want to be at the right place, at the right time, to tell it correctly in a way that is true to the story. To what really happened, because I am recording an

event. You have to be able to take that photo and it has to be able to stand by itself.

R: Are you still an advocate when you are photographing protests and movement work?

A: Whenever I am doing street photography that's for myself, I am taking photos of how I see the event happening. When I am taking photos as a photojournalist I am an advocate for the story. My job is to tell it truthfully.

R: When you are covering a protest, and you're taking pictures of people who may not be represented well in a photo, how do you treat those subjects as an advocate?

A: That is a really really tough question to answer, because in reality I am also an activist but I try to make a separation when I am covering a story as a journalist. That being said, it's really difficult to say that I don't sympathize. If you see a face you see an expression and that is the strongest way to communicate that emotion. It gets considered heavily, but it's a really fine line.

Like for example Raven from Unraveled is very cautious how we present activists, not trying to hide or anything but you don't have to show someone's face to show what is happening, especially in a world where there can be repercussions. But on the other hand, my job is to document everything and then it's my



editor's job to say whether we're going to show these photos or not. I can take photos of anything because unless there is a warrant to see my SD card, police officers cannot go through my photos.

It is definitely always a consideration since I'm also an activist and an organizer. I wouldn't want that to happen to me. That being said if I am there as a reporter and my job is to document.

R: In an artistic sense whether it is just for yourself or for a journalistic purpose, does the way that you approach your subject change?

A: Hmm, for street photography, yes. I am looking for something that speaks to the human condition. I hate using that word because it sounds so grandiose or whatever but I'm here to

document.

My photos, my street photography, are not relevant right now. It will be relevant in 30 years. So, I'm working right now for 30 years in the future. when we go, oh what is happening during the genocide, when we wonder if there was no one fighting against the genocidal state of Isreal. And I can be like: no there were and I have proof of them.

R: Like an archival purpose?

A: Yeah, yeah exactly. That is how I see the purpose of my street photography.

R and C: thank you. (: You can find more of Andres' work on Instagram @andresachavez



READ THE FULL INTERVIEW HERE:

WORD LADDER

GUESS THE NEXT WORD BY CHANGING ONE LETTER IN EACH ROW.

P	L	A	N	T
T	R	I	C	K

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

I know my rights, but what can I say when interacting with law enforcement to preserve them?

"I do not want to answer any questions right now, officer."

If they keep asking you questions you may ask:

"Am I free to go?"
If yes, walk away silently.

If no, you may want to assert your constitutional rights. If you choose to do so you must say out loud,

"I am invoking my 5th Amendment right to remain silent and my right to speak with my attorney."

Then do not say anything else until you speak to your attorney.

Memorize at least one phone number for someone you trust will be able to connect you to an attorney.

Important Legal Resources:
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights Hotline: 855-435-7693
Public Defenders Arrest Hot-Line: 844-817-4448
The National Lawyers Guild Arrest Hot-Line: 872-465-4244
Illinois Legal Aid Online: <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/>



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