

realeyes

SPRING 2025 VOLUME XXII



The photo essays in this magazine were produced by the photographers in the Spring 2025 Visual Storytelling class at U.C. Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. The instructor was Professor Ken Light.

REALEYES Vol. XXII © 2025 Regents University of California Berkeley May 2025 Berkeley, California

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REALEYES is published by the University of California Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. This magazine is supported by a generous grant from The Reva and David Logan Foundation.

The Graduate School of Journalism's Center for Photography maintains the school's Reva and David Logan Gallery of Documentary Photography and brings world-class photographers such as Sebastião Salgado, Marc Riboud, Susan Meiselas, Catherine Leroy, James Nachtwey and a host of others to speak to the students and the community. Twenty-Two years ago, the Center assisted in creating REALEYES magazine as well as numerous public events which have been held to illuminate important issues facing image-makers and journalists. They have featured seasoned photographers such as Galen Rowell, Don McCullin, Joel Meyerowitz, and publisher Gerhard Steidl and others. These events, including the speaker's program and the Reva and David Logan Biennial Photobook Symposium have been supported yearly by a generous grant from Reva and David Logan Foundation and the Fotovision Endowment created to enrich the students in the Graduate School of Journalism and the Bay Area Community.

For more information visit <http://journalism.berkeley.edu> or email Ken Light, Reva and David Logan Professor of Photojournalism at kenlight@berkeley.edu



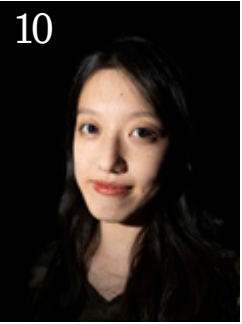
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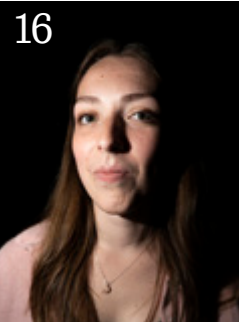
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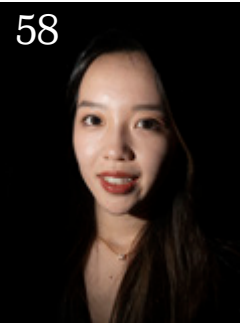
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CHOOSING TO BE PRESENT

WALTER MARINO

Months ago, my wife pleaded with me to spend more time with my kids. I was working deep into the nights and passing on our daily adventures to work more. I was missing walks, bedtime stories, parks, and movies—all things we used to share together.

During this time, my son was acting out and she told me that he needed his father. She said that even when I did spend time with them, I wasn't truly present. I told her that I did spend time with the kids every day, but in my heart, I knew she was right. Still, I had to sit with her words for some time to understand what she meant about being present. When I finally understood it I felt disappointed in myself.

When I was thinking about all the things I could cover in class, I fell in love with the idea of practicing the presence that my wife and kids missed. During this project, my camera helped me get back the moments I had been missing. I also began noticing and valuing moments that I hadn't before. Things like my daughter touching the color in light, tea parties, and their bedtime routine. By the end of it, my son had started inviting me to take photos of their activities and I noticed that he seemed much happier. And so did we all.









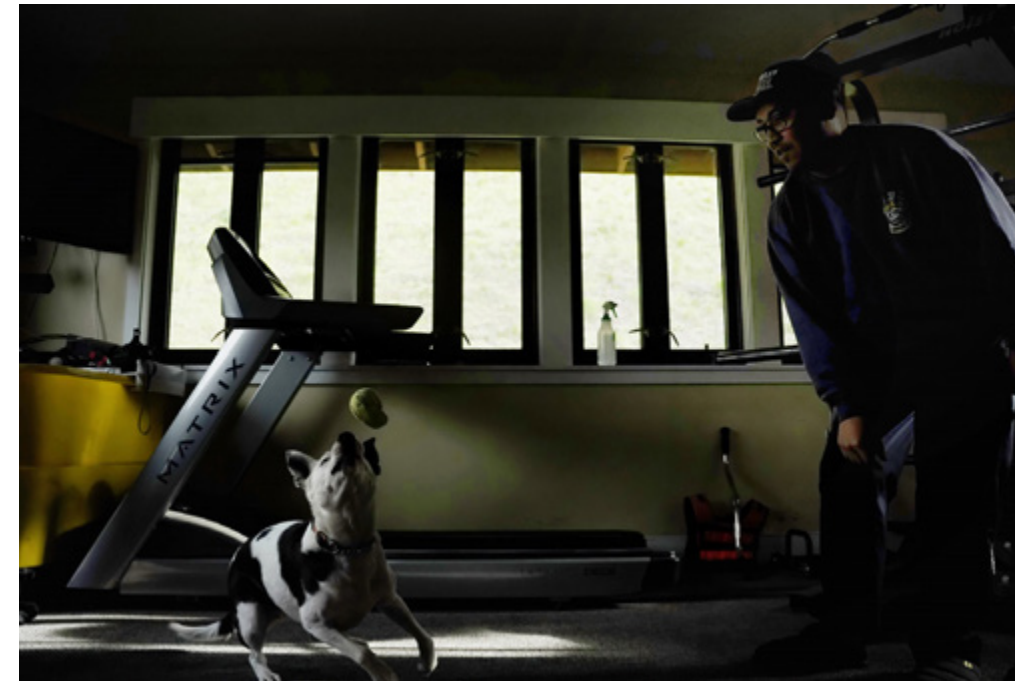
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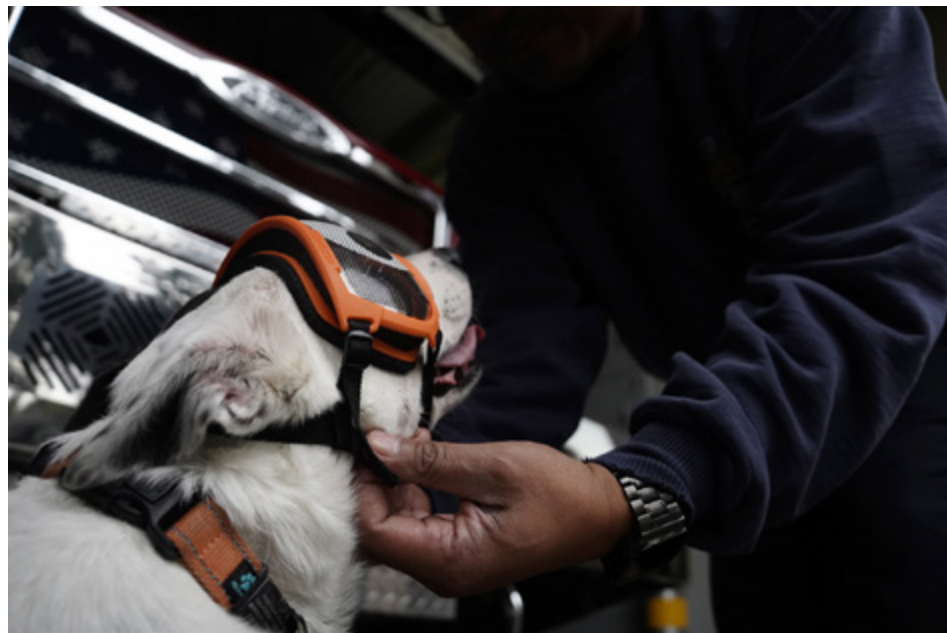
KELLY LIU



At the Berkeley Fire Department, Rudy Valencia and his search dog, Topa, are part of something rare. Topa's journey is just as remarkable as her work. She was once trapped in a sweltering, locked car for several hours and faced an uncertain future as the heat pressed in. Rescued just in time by police and placed in a shelter, her story could have ended there. However, she was given a second chance through the Search Dog Foundation, where her sharp instincts and boundless energy were transformed into life-saving skills. Eventually, she was paired with Rudy in Berkeley, California and played a vital role in search-and-rescue missions, including the deployment during Hurricane Ida.

Every week, Rudy and the other firefighter-handler teams from Berkeley, Oakland, and Sacramento train their dogs, ensuring they're always ready for disaster response. They're also part of a larger search dog network based in Oakland, where some dogs specialize in recovering the remains of missing persons. Recently, this team contributed significantly to the search efforts during the devastating LA wildfires.







MORE THAN A GAME

BECCA DUNCAN

As someone who grew up in the world of women's sports, I've experienced the unique strength and solidarity that forms within a team. Most recently, while working with college gymnasts, I witnessed how powerful those bonds can be. It wasn't about rivalry or individual glory, it was about lifting each other up—sometimes literally. What stood out most to me wasn't the competition but the moments in between: teammates cheering from the sidelines, offering a hand after a fall, or celebrating each other's progress like it was their own. That sense of collective support is what I set out to capture in this essay.

The images tell a story of women empowering women through their sport—not through winning, but through connection. In a world that frequently paints athletics as cutthroat and hyper-competitive, these photos are a reminder that it can be something more. They are about showing up for each other and strength that's shared and multiplied. It is strength not in domination, but in devotion to the craft, to each other, to something larger than the game. It's a testament to how sport can be a place of trust, growth, and community. A reminder that rising doesn't always mean being alone. For these athletes, it truly is more than a game; it's a space to grow, to be seen and to celebrate together.







DISENCHANTING THE VALLEY FANTASY

BRYAN WEN

Silicon Valley—the very heart of the global technology realm, home of the world’s most paramount tech giants, and the source of pervasive imaginations on innovation—cannot be found on the map. It resides in Santa Clara County, across the futuristic corporate campuses and within the people who feel connected to its cause. Immense wealth and power has flowed through here, transforming the cities, landscape, and people into what Silicon Valley’s leaders might call an everlasting fantasy for good; private and public spaces merged, the border between them became blurred, and people—locals and new immigrants alike—live in the new normality that the tech capital nurtured.

The Valley also attracts foreign tourists and entrepreneurs. In events held by the iconic tech companies, they come to chase the fantasy in reverence and reproduce it throughout the world. Yet, Silicon Valley is not free of cracks—the fantasy has its mundane side, its underbelly. This place relies on lands it overtook and gentrified, and indeed on the people it has engulfed. It is hard to witness and record the process, though, as security officers patrol these campuses. These images aim to find the remaining signs of its aftermath, symbols of normalized peculiarities, and the language that quietly reminds us to pay attention to them.







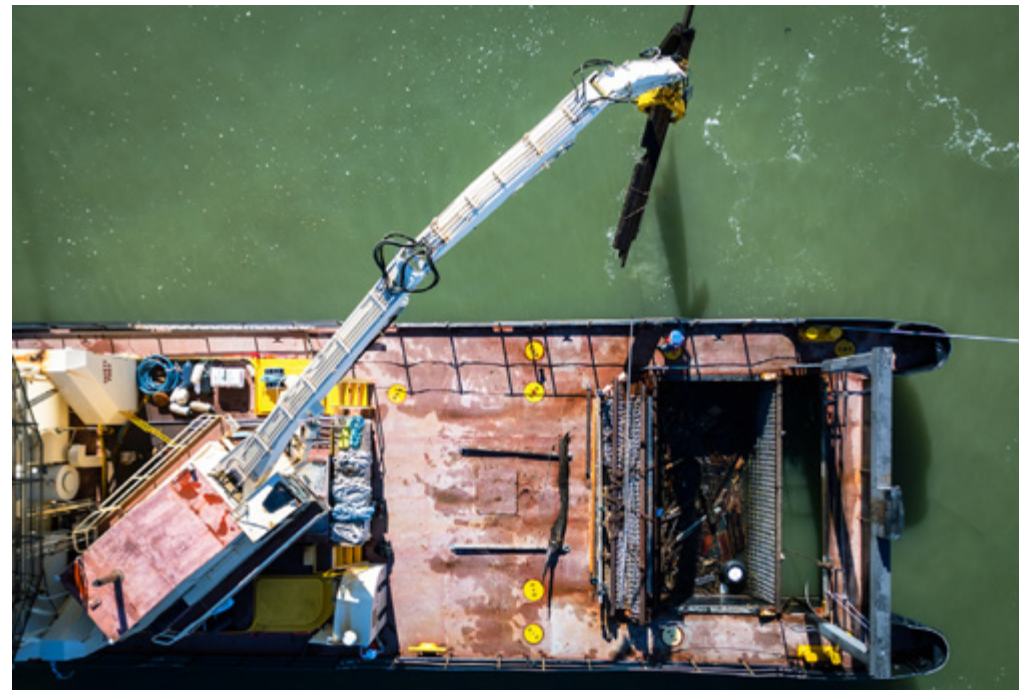
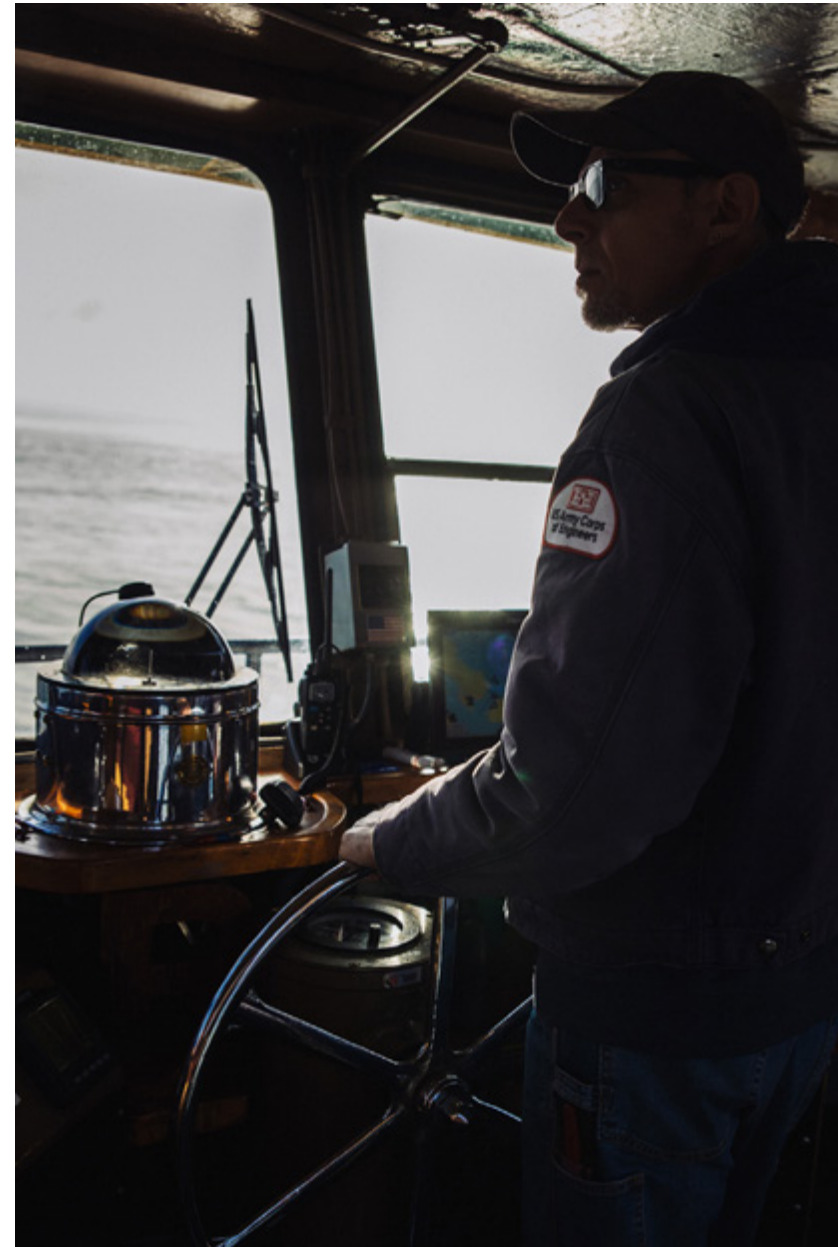
THE RACCOON OF THE BAY

RICHARD H. GRANT

The men of the **San Francisco District** of the US Army Corps of Engineers help keep the bay clear for transbay traffic. Based in Sausalito, the Navigation Mission began life after a June 1942 seaplane crash. Admiral Chester Nimitz was aboard from Hawaii to Washington D.C. via San Francisco. While landing in San Francisco Bay, his seaplane struck floating debris, ripping up the bottom of the aircraft, causing it to capsize, killing the pilot but sparing Nimitz.

They must simply putt around the waters of the San Francisco Bay aboard one of two repurposed ships, the fittingly named *Raccoon*, which is a former seaplane catcher much like Admiral Nimitz would have used, to hoist trash, debris, and abandoned vessels from the bay. Often led by tips from the San Francisco Bay Ferry, as storms pass through, breaking apart rotting docks and piers. However, the ferries are not allowed to touch the crumbling structures themselves; the Corps comes and pulls out the debris with harpoons from a small boat or the crane with a massive claw attached at the bow of the ship while opening the front gate of the boat to trawl the currents for any small debris sucking it up like a vacuum.









On my first visit to 403 Figueroa Drive—an apartment complex just south of the swath of homes incinerated by Altadena’s Eaton Fire—a woman I spoke with reflected that what was a nightmare for the grown-ups must be like summer camp for the kids: with no electricity in half of the building, packs of kids could be found running, scootering, and tricycling around the complex’s spacious concrete courtyard, their laughter echoing off the building’s tan, stuccoed walls throughout the afternoon.

For the adults, though, the Eaton Fire has meant rebuilding their lives from the ground-up. In March, some residents could be found unpacking their belongings from plastic bags used to prevent the entry of toxic particulate matter suspected to remain in the air; others repainted their flats with paint cans provided by their landlord. Half of the units remain without power or electricity. Now, the residents of 403 Figueroa are organizing to force their landlord to fix their damaged homes. “I’ve been reading forms for people in this building for as long as I can remember,” said Brenda Lopez, a 29 year-old server who lives in an upstairs unit with her parents, siblings, and seven-year-old daughter Mylady, and she is now representing the some 40 families who live in the apartment complex in their fight with their landlord. “So this all feels a bit like that, in a way: standing up for my neighbors.”

403 FIGUEROA

THOMAS SAWANO







BEHIND THE BEATS

NAVA RAWLS

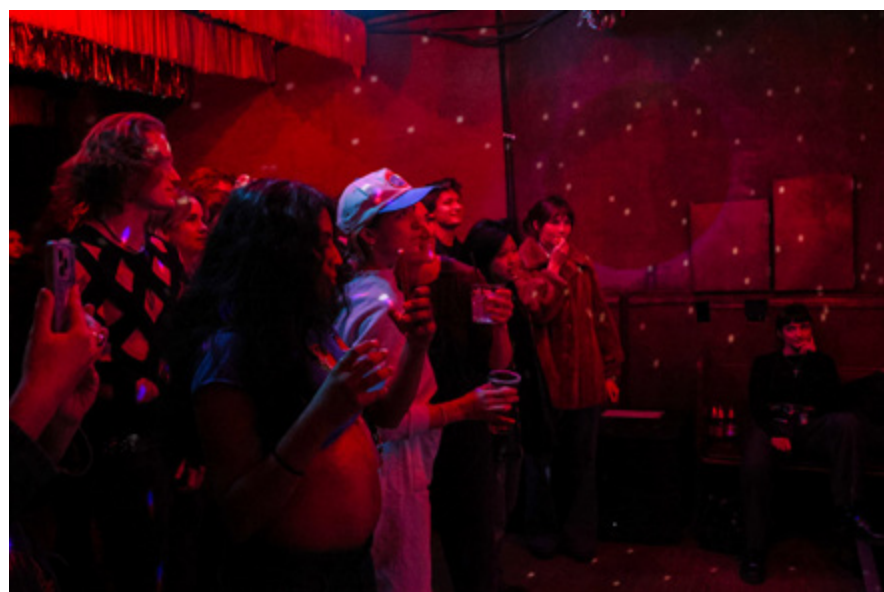


The Bay Area has a vibrant DJ and local music culture. From weekend day parties to underground raves, local artists are integral to the Bay Area's nightlife and overall heartbeat. But outside of big venues and stages, musicians and disc jockeys commit hours of work to perfect their passions, several practicing in the confines of their bedrooms. For three months, I documented DJs and musicians performing at their shows and honing their craft in the spaces in between: sifting through personal record collections, navigating equipment, and putting in the work to create the perfect soundscape for a room of dancing night goers.

As exotic dancers draw in the attention of the crowd at Oakland's Stork Club, a collective of disc jockeys transition through the perfect jungle tracks for the occasion. In their sunny apartment in San Francisco's Inner Sunset neighborhood, a young DJ sifts through their expansive collection of vinyl records. No matter the genre, the type of equipment, or even the size of the audience, all of these artists have one thing in common: a love of the music and the community people who cared enough to listen.







ISTANBUL, *NE VAR NE YOK?*

JOHN KLOPOTOWSKI

“Ne var ne yok?” is a common way to ask “what’s up?” in Turkish. Literally, it translates to “what is and what isn’t?” I used this as a mantra as I walked around Istanbul in March with my camera, looking for what is and isn’t in the city—or perhaps, what is rendered seen and unseen.

Like in any big city (and Istanbul, with more than 16 million people, is *big*), movement is so constant in the old Ottoman capital that it seems to have its own inertia. Always moving. But two events in March applied enough external force upon the city to change its state of motion: the holy month of Ramadan, and the arrest of the city’s mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu. As I followed both the spiritual and political happenings—feasts, demonstrations, calls to prayer, marches—I made pictures with the intention of bringing viewers into the city’s unseen spaces: train stations where protestors prepare to march, service workers across the city, and fasters ready for evening prayer.







THE QUEERS ARE KILLING AMERICA

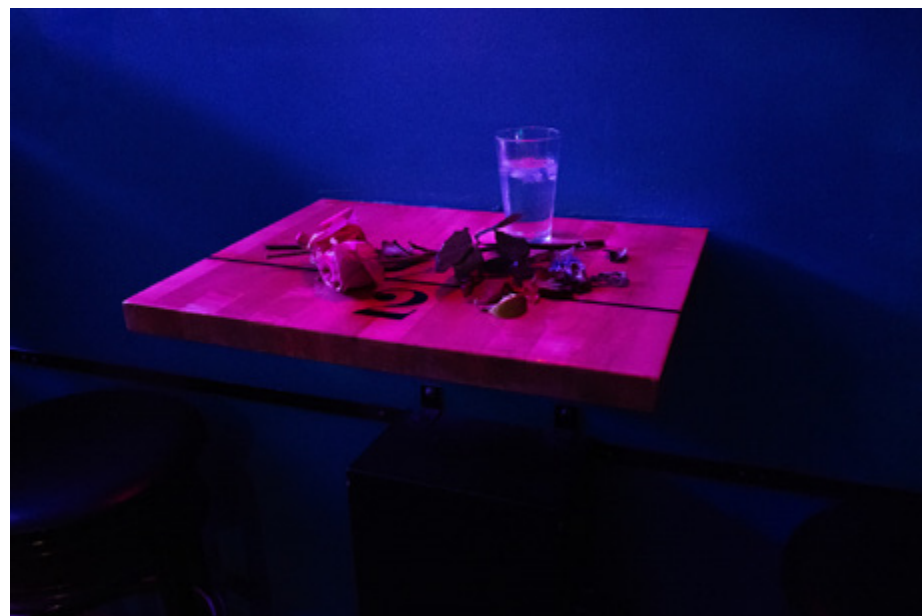
SOPHIA CUTINO

“The Queers are Killing America” is a photography project documenting lesbian bar culture in San Francisco, from Mother and Jolene’s to MANGO at El Rio. San Francisco is one of the 34 cities in the United States with at least one designated lesbian bar. Although the U.S. lesbian bar population is up from a record low of 20 in 2020, we are at just a fraction of the ~200 that existed in 1980. The shockingly low number of lesbian bars across the U.S. is not representative of the thriving culture and community of sapphics.

The title represents the homophobic sentiments among the President, his cabinet, and other alt-right groups that are growing in mainstream popularity. Their words, their actions, and their beliefs of the queer community are not based in fact but rather the fear of not having control or power to suppress people into nuclear-family submission. The reality that the Trump Administration and its followers do not see is that these spaces are not dangerous or threatening—they’re fun, passionate, and beautiful. Despite the loss of basic human rights and the threat of restricting bodily autonomy and romantic preferences, there is still hope and there is still a party.







24/7 TIGER DAD

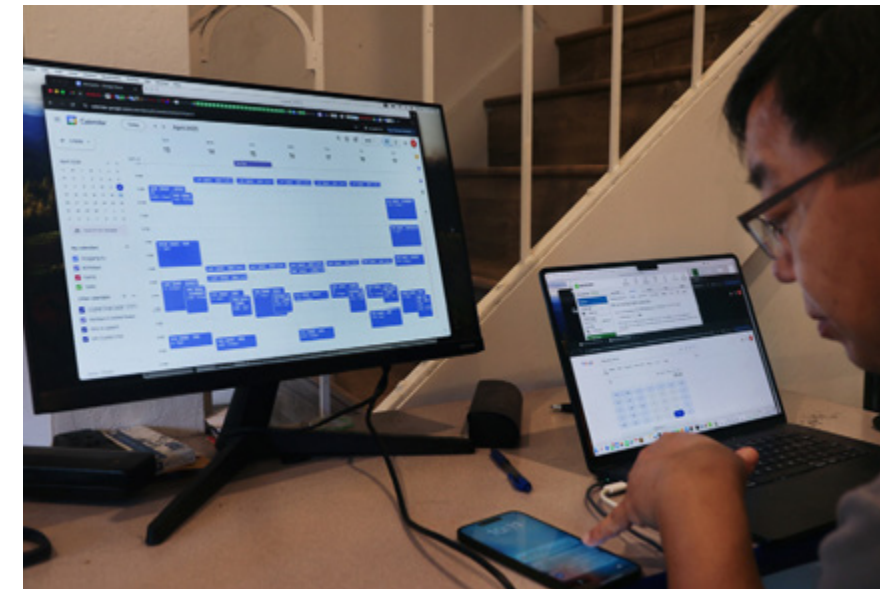
SOPHIA SUN



“Tiger Dad,” or 虎爸 in Mandarin, is a term to describe a demanding, often strict father who pushes his child or children to excel in academic and extracurricular activities, usually using childrearing practices that are traditional in China and other parts of East Asia.

I spent Saturdays with the Xu family, an American-born Chinese household whose weekends are anything but restful. From dawn to dusk, father Xu Dinggang juggles his job as a buyer agent while shuttling his kids between a dizzying lineup of extracurriculars: ice hockey games, volleyball practice, art classes, and advanced math tutoring. What unfolds is not just a glimpse into a busy family’s routine, but a vivid portrait of the Bay Area’s intense Asian parenting 鸡娃 (jī wá) culture—in these spaces, parenting can feel more like project management. Through my lens, I captured quiet moments of fatigue, focused determination, and the unspoken drive that fuels this cycle of high expectations and structured success.

As a Chinese storyteller, this project hit close to home. I found myself reflecting on my own upbringing: the packed schedules, the silent competition, the unspoken need to constantly prove oneself to everyone else. Photographing the Xu family felt like looking into a mirror, revealing not just their routine but the deeper emotional cost that a family who is always pushing forward pays. This story is about a culture of ambition, love, and pressure that many Asians and Asian Americans carry, and it asks what it means to care, to push, and to be enough.









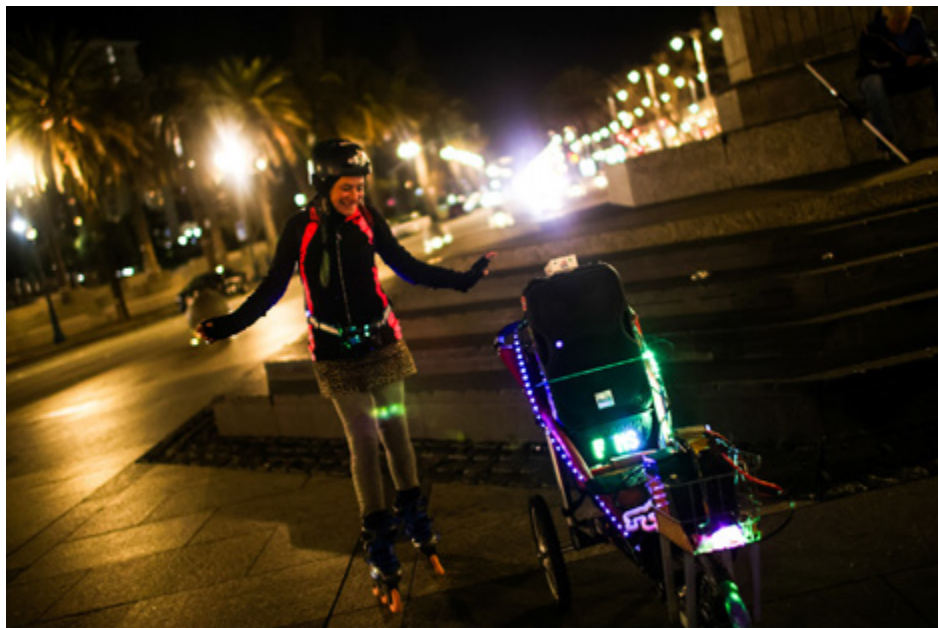
At night, **San Francisco becomes a city of contradictions**, cloaked in fog and lit by ambition. A couple clinks wine glasses over a multi-course tasting menu that costs more than some people earn in a week. Just blocks away, a man curls beneath a blanket of cardboard, the city's chill creeping into his bones. The glow from high-rises reflects off Teslas, while someone nearby searches for a working water fountain. These moments don't scream, they observe. They let the quiet tension of coexistence speak: in the same square mile, luxury and neglect take place side by side.

But the divide isn't just economic, it's one of attention. In some spaces, people debate foreign policy, climate, and markets over craft cocktails. In others, life is too immediate for abstraction. When you're rationing socks or waiting hours for a meal, a distant war might as well be on another planet. The camera captures not just poverty or wealth, but detachment, the way a city can blur pain into background noise. Here, compassion and indifference ride the same train. Some are so immersed in curated lives that suffering only matters if it trends; others are too entangled in surviving to look up. This isn't a city of opposites, it's a city looking away from itself. And whether you're visible at all depends entirely on where you stand, or if you have a place to stand.

THE VOID OF THE NIGHT

DENIS AKBARI









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