

Querida Catrina de Oakland,

From the moment we met you in Mexico, we knew you were someone special. We just didn't yet know how much room you would take up.

In our plaza, in our hearts, and, as it turns out, in our storage plans.

You arrived a week ahead of schedule. Some might call that early. We think you knew we needed you.

Your journey north echoed the journeys of so many migrants who have carried their memories, traditions, and hopes along these paths since long before these borders crossed us. You, too, arrived carrying stories, dressed in flowers, ready to make a home among us.

You found us weary from cruelty, coward-ICE, and injustice. And there you stood, with your arms open wide enough to embrace an entire neighborhood. You reminded us that we belong here, in the places we have built with our labor, sacrifice, care, and love. No politician gets to erase those roots.

The hands of the Artsumex artisans gave you form, and Fruitvale welcomed you into the family. With cempasúchil and California poppies, you brought our homes on both sides of the border into bloom together. Your monarchs carried stories of migration and return. And your magnificent presence gave us permission to look up, pause, and smile.

For a month, life gathered around you in this plaza. People came from near and far to admire you, take a photograph, and linger a little longer. You handled all that attention beautifully. For someone made of bones, you certainly know how to work a crowd.

It all culminated in our 31st annual Día de los Muertos celebration, when we came together in joy, remembrance, and resistance. Around you, we made room for the living and the dead, for grief and laughter, for the people beside us and those we carry within us. We remembered that celebration, too, can be a way of standing our ground.

Now we say goodbye, for a little while. We will prepare for your return as we prepare for our beloved souls: with flowers, memories, and a place waiting for you. Like the monarchs finding their way home, may you always find your way back to Fruitvale.

As you leave this plaza, know that you leave it better than you found it. You leave us with stories to tell, a little more courage, and hope for tomorrow. May those who crossed into the world of

our ancestors this year help guide us. May we hold that hope firmly and give it purpose, in the care we offer one another, in the communities we defend, and in the justice we insist upon.

Descansa, querida Catrina. Even a woman of your stature deserves to put her feet up.

We'll carry the work forward until we meet again.

La lucha continua: Aquí estamos y NUNCA nos vamos.

Evelyn Orantes, Curator