

Episode 6: Celia Sagastume (Astrosagas)

Celia Sagastume: Hello. My name is Celia Sagastume, and I'm the artist astrologer behind Astrosagas. I love to do visual spells. I love to work with animation and video in order to relay information and insight about the world.

My story with the San Francisco starts before I was born because I am first-generation Guatemalan. My parents were dating back in Guatemala City in the early '80s when my dad was claimed by his mother for citizenship here in the United States. My mom had zero interest in moving to United States. Zero.

He would save up his money and fly to Guatemala City about every six months or so and tried to convince my mom to move out here. Finally, two years passed by, and he's like, "All right. I got to change my strategy here. Why don't you come and visit America with me? I'll show you why I think it's such a beautiful place."

Of course, my dad took my mom to San Francisco. There's a picture of them in front of the Golden Gate Bridge in '85 or something, which is before I was born. That was the trip that convinced my mom to move here. Of course, it was contingent.

At the time, my dad was like, "Look, we'll live in the United States for 10 years, and then we'll save up a bunch of money, and we'll move back to Guatemala." My mom was like, "Chill. I'll do that," because my mom never really wanted to live here. Literally, right after high school, I spent a year at the university studying advertising. I hated it. I ran straight back to San Francisco.

I've been here ever since. It's now been 14 years that I've been here in the Bay Area, which I think after 10, you get honorary citizenship. I can say I'm pretty cool here. I just feel at home here. I feel seen, and I feel accepted.

My work is about astrology predominantly. I studied cognitive psychology at the graduate level at SF State, which I was lucky to do. There, I learned about the effect of the identities that you attach yourself to, the identities that you subscribe to, and how they influenced your behaviors and your thoughts.

That is inspiring to me in my work. That is what I look towards when I talk about the horoscopes, when I talk about astrology signs, and when I talk about the vibrance connection between ourselves and the larger universe around us.

Frida Kahlo, definitely, somebody who criticized and thought deeply about gender norms, gender categories, the way that they're expressed, had a lot of deep criticisms about capitalism, which I have a lot of [laughs] resistance about capitalism in my astrology work, and had a lot to say.

I feel like one of the biggest paintings that resonate with me is the one where she draws a clear line between Mexico and the United States. Mexico is the land of pyramids, flowers, skeletons, and energy, basically, like energetic connection with the land. The United States of the land of capitalism, production, and consumerism.

I feel like in a lot of ways, astrology, for me represents that reconnection with Earth, the reconnection with spirit, the reconnection with the vibrant energy that exists that is outside of capitalism, outside of empiricism, and outside of production.

For that reason, astrology is so threatening to scientists. For lack of a better word, threatening to psychologists because why else would they deeply criticize it so much if it wasn't so threatening to the structure of individualism and Western capitalism.

One of the things that I have thought about a lot with the Frida Kahlo Project, in particular, is the commercial reproduction of Frida Kahlo's image. I feel like everywhere we turn on every single platform, you have a Frida Kahlo's. Why is Western capitalism so obsessed with Frida Kahlo?

Why is her image reproduced so obsessively and so compulsively on every single platform and in every single consumer product possible, especially this socialist, Mexican rebel artist who wanted nothing to do with that kind of production, wanted nothing to do with consumerism, and wanted nothing to do with American Western as it exists, as it existed then and as it exists now?

For me, at least, part of why we have so many different avatars of Frida Kahlo and so many reproductions of her work and why her image is reproduced around the world is because she signifies vulnerability. She signifies the open expression of trauma and grief that is unapologetic and fiercely, fiercely brave and courageous.

She looked deeply into the abyss of human experience, the pain of human experience, and the difficulty of human experience. She didn't try to hide it. She didn't try to put a shiny glitter on it. She didn't try to tell you, "Everything's going to be alright in the end." She just said, "This is what it is. This is how I feel. This is how difficult things were. I am proud of it."

Thinking about Frida Kahlo and thinking about how to honor her spirit, we have to stop reproducing her image. She doesn't want to be your container and your projection of pain, of trauma, of grief, and of compassion.

Instead, we need to integrate that energy and become agents of transformation, of compassion, of acceptance, of tolerance, and of witnessing people. Being here for the messiness. Being here for the pain. Being here for seeing it all the way through. Being able to believe that people can change.

Believe that people are worth something even if they're not always perfect, even if they're not always on point, and even if they're not always correct. Believe in the worthiness of this experience in and of itself of all the pain, of all the trauma, of all the grief, of all the difficulty.

Knowing that embracing that messiness, that trauma, that pain, that grief as part of the human experience and integrating it into your body and becoming a fully realized being means that we'll no longer need Frida Kahlo Barbie doll. We'll no longer need all these reproductions of her image.

We will no longer need Frida Kahlo mugs, Frida Kahlo mouse pads, and Frida Kahlo iPhone covers because we will be our own Frida Kahlo's. We will be our own pain, and we will be our own unabashed, unashamed, acceptors and acceptance of truth of the human experience, all of its messiness and all of its disgusting abyss.

[pause]

Rio Yañez: This podcast was brought to you by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Next up, we have the brilliant Marilet Martinez, a local comedian. Hear more about her story growing up as a Chicana in the Mission District, and her new project inspired by strong women like Frida Kahlo.

For more information on the artist featured in the series, please visit deyoung.famsf.org. This is your host, Rio Yañez. I will see you next time.

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