

ARTS+CULTURE

SUN
DAY



ARTISTS UNITED

Last month, for the first time in its 40-year history, the Human Rights Campaign — the nation’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer civil rights organization — declared a state of emergency after a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills passed in several states, with more than 75 enacted this year alone. Against this backdrop of growing anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, we asked members of San Diego’s arts community to tell us what it’s like to be an LGBTQ+ artist in America right now. In their own words, they paint a picture of a community under attack — one filled with fear and frustration, anger and disbelief, and broken promises. At the same time, they share stories of resilience and community, celebration and connection, and, most importantly, unconditional love. **Pages E6-E8**



MARISA CRANE



KIAN KLINE-CHILTON



LINDSAY WHITE



KORI GILLIS



RIRI FRANKLIN

K.C. ALFRED U-T PHOTOS

“A miraculous night of illusions, intrigue, sex and comedy.”

Book by
ROGER O. HIRSON

Music & Lyrics by
STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Directed by
NICK DEGRUCCIO

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MARISA (MAC) CRANE

They/them

Age: 33 **Birthplace:** Allentown, Pa.
Instagram: @marisa_crane

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.
A: Despite our country's determination to legislate us out of existence, despite the book bans, I still feel a deep gratitude and joy associated with creating as a queer, nonbinary person. We are making history, we are redefining possibility, and we are embracing the very queerness of creation, of imagining better presents for ourselves and reaching toward beautiful futures. I feel grateful to write and publish alongside some of the greatest queer and trans writers to ever exist, to collaborate with and learn from them. It's really special, and our insistence on embracing ourselves, our joy, and our love is something to celebrate.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.
A: I'm a jock, writer, partner, parent and sweatpants enthusiast. My debut novel, "I Keep My Exoskeletons to Myself," which was selected as a New York Times Editors' Choice, is a queer dystopian novel exploring themes of shame, oppression, grief, surveillance, parenting, and the healing power of community and found family. Otherwise, my work, which is often speculative, experimental or surreal, largely focuses on gender, queerness, identity, desire, performance, and what it means to try to be a person in the world.

As a queer artist, “our insistence on embracing ourselves, our joy and our love is something to celebrate.”

KIAN KLINE-CHILTON

Kiki/they/he (“My friends call me Mama Kiki”)

Age: 27 **Birthplace:** La Mesa
Instagram: @kian.k.c.

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.
A: In so many ways, this is the most important time to let my queerness be the most beautiful and important thing to me. It is so crucial that I never, at any moment, am ashamed of what makes me so unique. It is a gift to be queer and an even greater joy to be a queer artist. Despite the efforts to erase us, I know that the community is triumphant. I'm really grateful to be in a moment of transition and growth. My life is radiantly evolving every day, and that is never lost on me. In a lot of ways, I have never felt more beautiful than I do now. But I know that can't be every day. And so I let my art and my creativity be the joy and inspiration. There's a tenacity to being a queer artist. We know that we have the power to create empathy and transform past the norm. America has asked us to shrink, and we have gotten louder and prouder. We are defiant. I am empowered by all my queer family and allies. I am resilient.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.
A: I'm an early-career director residing in Southern California. I'm the newly appointed artistic producer of Diversionary Theatre. It's the third-oldest LGBTQ+ theater in the country. To say I'm honored would be an understatement, frankly. There's no real way to describe the jubilation of being in a space of dedicated and fabulous queer folx. It really is one of the best teams I have ever had the privilege of being on. We have nine broad-reaching arts education programs that change lives and inspire queer youth to be the brightest stars they can be. And we have our gorgeous Clark Cabaret that hosts a multitude of events from karaoke, live music and “Drag Race” watch parties. I have the honor of facilitating the art that will get done here, introducing San Diego to some of the best queer talent, and creating accessibility to the arts in numerous communities.
Since 2021, I've been so fortunate to be a freelance director and develop some of the most exciting world premieres around San Diego. The focus of the work I have been a part of has been primarily assisting and associate directing in women-led rooms on pieces that explore the bridges between culture and identity. It's been an honor to be a part of the great shift of how we tell queer and women stories and, most important for me, stories that allow young artists like myself to be seen in the work that's being produced.
Overall, I pride myself on being a community-based artist who strives to embrace the intersection between art and activism. I am an artist because I love to embrace and celebrate what makes us unique, especially the queer community. For me, theater is a sanctuary where we come to be a part of something.



“It is a gift to be queer and an even greater joy to be a queer artist. Despite the efforts to erase us, I know that the community is triumphant.”

“Communities are successful when they are rooted ...
in unconditional love and celebration of each member.”



LINDSAY
WHITE

She/her
Age: 40 **Lives in:** San Diego
Website: lindsaywhitemusic.com
Instagram: @lindsaywhitemusic

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.
A: Living in America today as a queer artist is a paradoxical experience. I am filled with fury as I witness targeted attacks on queer and trans folks in what is an obvious attempt to obliterate separation of church and state and distract from all the ways our systems and leaders fail to actually keep people safe. What so many don't understand — or, horrifyingly, do — is how this behavior translates into actual mental, emotional and physical distress, and even loss of life for young people in particular. Amid this heavy reality, I'm buoyed by the beauty of my real and chosen family. I'm reminded by these deep connections that communities are successful when they are rooted not only in collective survival but also in unconditional love and celebration of each member. That is the only gay agenda I've ever been privy to, and I cherish any person (queer or not) or institution willing to sacrifice their time, energy and privilege to advance it. From my vantage point as an independent artist who is also a queer woman and new mother trying to survive capitalism in San Diego, I have an acute awareness of the ways my identities and my labor within them are exploited. Yet my cis/White-ness (among other privileges) translates to an enormous degree of insulation from serious harm that so many others don't enjoy. So my purpose as an artist is to creatively express and leverage as much fury, beauty, awareness, experience and privilege as possible to help untangle the "not-it" mentality that comes practically installed as a feature of the American brand. I believe we are all "it." We are all connected to and responsible for each other's safety and well-being. For me, it's not just about what's legal or ethical — it's a reclamation of our one-ness.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.
A: To accompany my latest single "Disappearing" (featuring Anna Ballew), I conducted a survey of working mothers and other "heroes" about the experience of embodying roles and identities that are socially revered yet systemically under-resourced. Their responses were curated into a creative community digital art piece called the "Disappearing Project." On the writing front, I'm expanding "Qulyn," my journal line "for folks with feels," while inching toward the completion of my first full-length book, "Dead Mom Talking." Most importantly, I'm continuing to participate in and promote the work of We All We Got SD, a grassroots mutual aid network that distributes food and other resources to neighbors made vulnerable to the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and other harmful systems. (Anyone who thinks mutual aid isn't an art form should dive in to find out just how much creativity is required!)

KORI GILLIS
(KO-"G")

Him/his/they/them
Birthplace: East Chicago, Ind.
Age: 47 **Website:** kogeessoul.com
Instagram: @kogee23

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.
A: I have been singing covers and singing in cover bands for several years. Decades, in fact. The motivation to create original music came later in life for me. This was mostly because the thought of showing the world who I was while growing up in the '90s in the Chicagoland area was a terrifying thought. And it was literally against policy while I was a lead singer in the U.S. Navy Music program during "don't ask, don't tell." So, I am truly grateful to be able to perform in San Diego as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. It took me a while to get to this point, and I could not be more excited for what the future holds.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.
A: KoGee Soul Reprise is a musical experience that encompasses all the joy, love and emotional indulgence that soul music provides. I also wrote, produced and sang lead on the 2021 San Diego Music Award-nominated Best R&B/Funk/Soul Album "Silver Lining." In recent years, KSR Productions has been entertaining the Hillcrest/North Park community with original productions, including "The Soul of a Decade," the R&B decades show "R&B and Broadway" and its new "'90s R&B Tea Dance" in venues (that include) The Merrow, Diversionary Theatre's Clark Cabaret and AWOL Bar San Diego. KoGee Soul Reprise has also been performing the tunes from the debut album in larger venues around town, including the Belly Up Tavern, The Holding Company and the Music Box.

“I am truly grateful to be able to perform in
San Diego as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.
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K.C. ALFRED U-T PHOTOS

RIRI FRANKLIN

They/them

Age: 25 Lives in: San Diego Instagram: @alienby.comics Twitter/Tumblr: @alienbycomics

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.

A: My name is Riri Franklin and I make short comics about being a transfemme nonbinary person. I grew up in a conservative part of Southern California in a private religious school that was adamantly anti-LGBTQIA+ and even put some of my friends through conversion therapy. Because of this environment, it's taken me years to unravel my religious trauma, get in touch with my true self, and find the courage to come out. I'm currently living in North County and came out as nonbinary a couple of years ago.

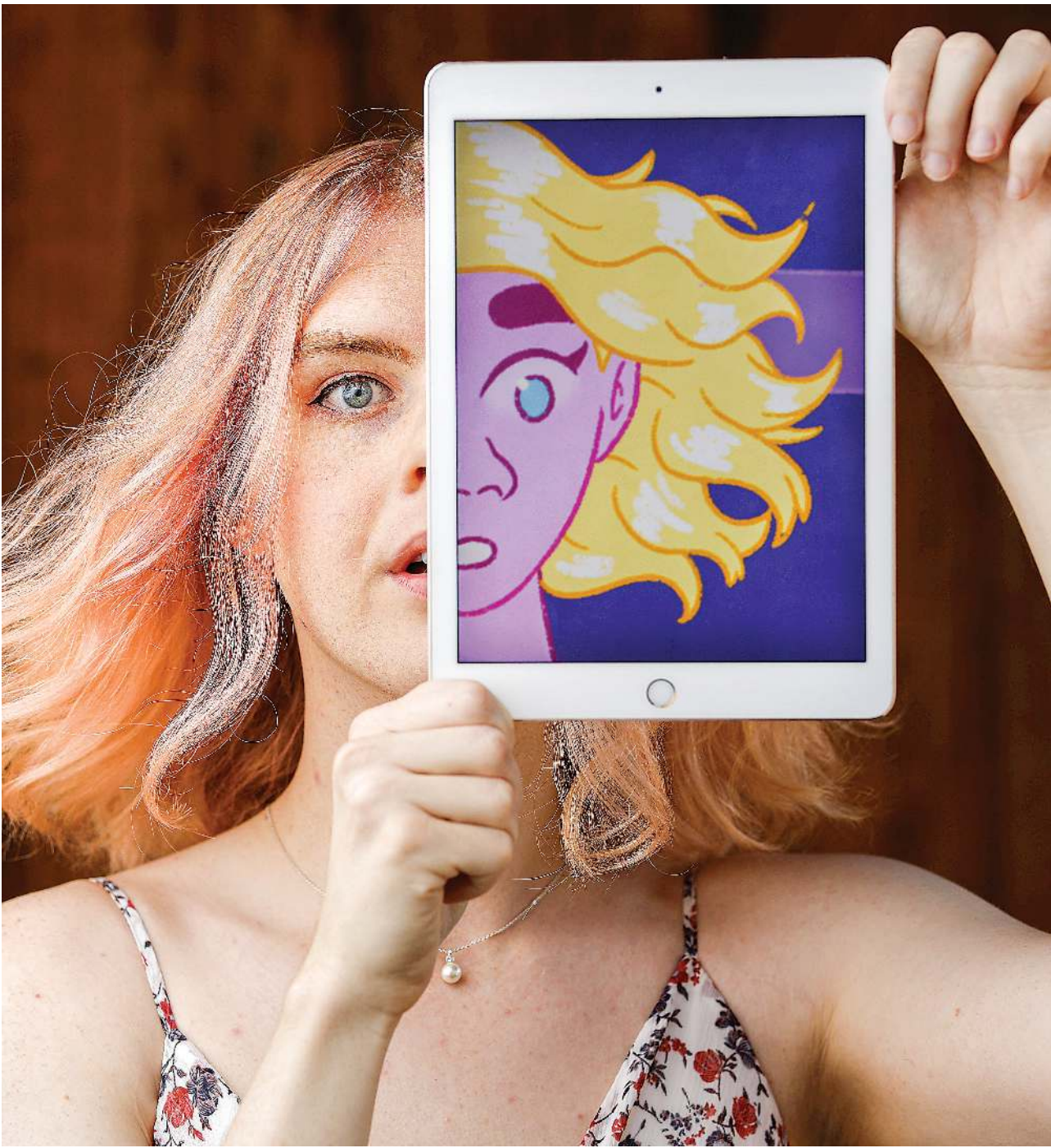
While San Diego is one of the more progressive and accepting cities in the U.S., I still often deal with feeling out of place in public, and strangers stare at me very often. I've been laughed at, catcalled, heckled in bathrooms, and photographed without my permission. Nonbinary trans people like me often stand out in a crowd because we don't easily fit into people's presuppositions and categories that they constantly place others into. These challenges often leave me without energy to make my art. But I always have plenty of experiences to make comics about!

It's no secret that the sociopolitical climate in the U.S. has been very hostile toward trans people. We are exhausted, overwhelmed, numb and desperate for hope that things will be OK. Because of this, a lot of queer art and content I see expresses rage and mourning — and rightfully so. But I want my art to express the beauty of transness, the joy of finding yourself and living authentically despite all the hardships of being marginalized. I hope my art gives trans people comfort and joy, and cis people empathy for the trans people in their lives.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.

A: I work as a graphic designer in my day job, and make art in my free time. Alienby Comics (from alien + enby, a nickname for nonbinary people) started as an art project with my therapist as a way to reflect on things that have happened in my life recently or that have been on my mind. My comics embody complex feelings and experiences through a fun fantastical lens, with topics like moments of gender euphoria, awkward encounters with strangers, troubles while buying clothes, reflections on my religious upbringing, and imaginary confrontations between me and past or future versions of myself.

Since I started making these comics for my own catharsis, I didn't know how many people would connect to my story in such personal ways! I'm amazed by how many people have had similar stories and say they feel seen by my art. My comics have become a tool by which other trans people can share their experiences to others in ways they didn't have the vocabulary to communicate themselves.



“As a gay artist, I have been gifted an outlet ... that many LGBTQIA+ individuals struggle to find, especially when attacked for being true to his/her/their identity.”



ALEXANDER ROJAS SALAZAR

He/him/his

Age: 50 Birthplace: Houston Instagram: @sdartadvisory.com

Q: Tell us what it's like living in America today as an LGBTQ+ artist and how it is impacting your life and your work.

A: Many years ago, I started a series of paintings about healing. I was in my 30s and battling serious depression, and one day in my outdoor studio I took gallons and gallons of black paint and aggressively released any emotion I was holding back and threw it on the canvas. Hours later, I sat in silence and stared and cried with what was looking back at me — a canvas full of chaos and, ironically, balance. Now titled “The Impact Series,” it reminds me to stop and heal during emotional chaos — something that continues to be a pendulum in my life as a gay Mexican American artist. I moved to San Diego in 2001 from Boston for the summer and never left. It's been a very long summer, you might say. Now, 22 years later and after three failed long-term, serious and “madly in love” relationships, I find myself single and 50. My “goals” of having a loving husband and children are now focused on relearning how to love myself and taking care of my three boys — my dogs Toby, Lucky and Charlie.

Q: Tell us more about yourself and/or your work.

A: I am the CEO and curator of SD Art Advisory, a new gallery in Mission Hills. As a gay artist, I have been gifted an outlet — a way to heal my innermost pain and find peace — a feeling that many LGBTQIA+ individuals struggle to find, especially when attacked for being true to his/her/their identity within a country that wants too hard for them to seem perfect to the rest of the world. My shifts in style in my art is a reflection of my life in every single way/day/moment that I live. As such, I've been creating a series of paintings that started during COVID — “Hearts of Hope and Love.” These paintings are reminders that we survived a pandemic and that we have “hope and love” within ourselves, within our own hearts. But lately, I have been climbing up a ladder and the roof of my house to once again throw black paint. I close my eyes and throw my stress, anxiety, depression, fear, pain, hurt, loneliness, sadness and watch it hit the canvas, filtering the chaos and creating a perfect impact that resonates with what it sometimes feels like to be me: a gay middle-aged single Latino man. But as I climb down the ladder, I smile and walk away knowing that the thoughts will never control what it's like to be alive and healthy and loved by so many friends and family in San Diego that have supported my life as an artist. My art will always remind me that healing never ends — just like being gay will never end.