

FRESNO CITY COLLEGE HOSTS THIRD ANNUAL QUEER HOUSING SUMMIT

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The third Queer Housing Summit, a convention centered around housing insecurity, queer identity and sociopolitical issues, happened at Fresno City College on Aug. 23 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Representatives from the South Tower Community Land Trust, Housing Now California, BlaQueer Fresno and guests from around the world gathered in the OAB to share resources, exchange ideas and encourage queer joy.

Planning Committee Member and Presenter Jasmine Leiva said that Fresno City College is a fitting location to hold the event, as it's where she first learned about her own identity.

"It was such a revolutionary space for me," Leiva said. "It's really important for us to have spaces that are art centered, that are queer, that are trans, that are immigrant, all these identities that we hold to feel safe and protect each other."

Keynotes

KB Brookins was a keynote speaker at the summit, and spoke about their published book, "Pretty," a powerful memoir about their life experiences growing up queer.

"It is vital and important to, by any means, record queer and trans joy," Brookins said. "It is so easy to access hate and negativity within the queer community, so it is more important now than ever to record and document the joyous things."

Brookins highlighted the importance of documenting joy throughout their book with memories, stories and pictures.

Tracy Rosenthal, the second keynote speaker, also wrote and published "Abolish Rent," a nonfiction novel focusing on housing insecurity. Rosenthal said they acknowledge that as a society we are taught to call legal aid, vote for change or call social services. However, Rosenthal believes that the power of society lies elsewhere.

"For me, what's crucial is that we take our own power seriously, that we turn to our neighbors and communities and take those as the instruments we need to wage this war," Rosenthal said.

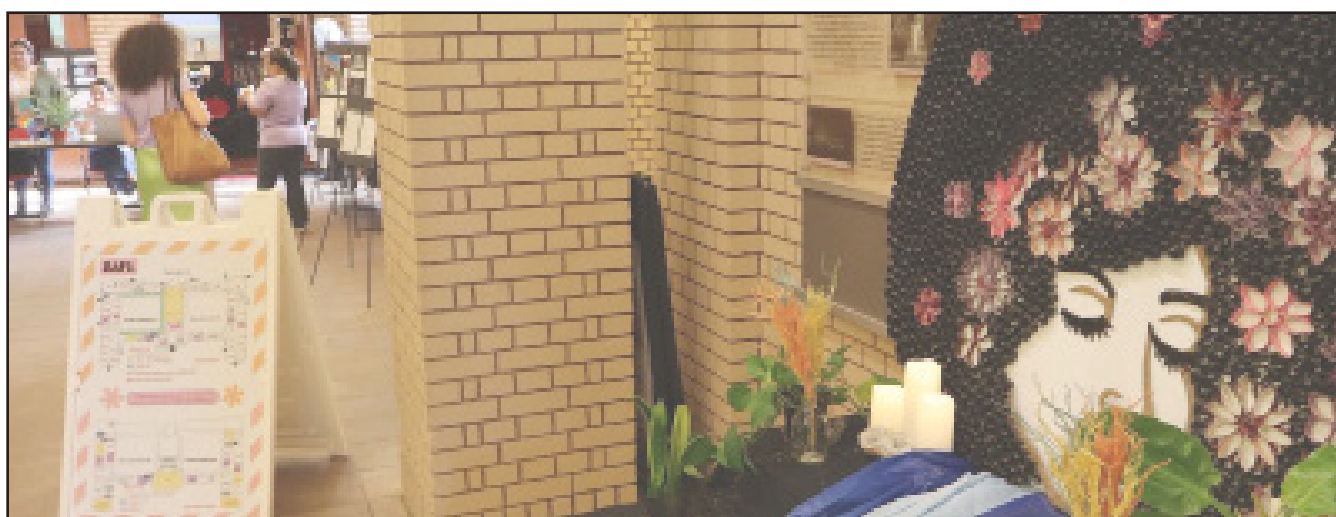
They spoke about moving from a place of insecurity and instability to a place of defiance and power. Rosenthal encouraged tenants to group together as a community and speak up against rent that is rising in shared spaces.

South Tower Community Land Trust

Kiel Lopez-Schmidt is the founding executive director of the South Tower Community Land Trust, a nonprofit organization that aims to revitalize the housing of the South Tower District in Fresno to make it equitable and achievable for all.

"We've been standing up against industrial expansion, standing up for healthy food access, standing up for the human right at home as well as access to the most amazing amenities that a community deserves, like parks," Lopez-Schmidt said.

Lopez-Schmidt addressed the recently opened Broadway



VISHINNA TURNER'S ART PIECE IS DISPLAYED IN THE OLD ADMINISTRATION BUILDING OUTSIDE OF THE BUSINESS OFFICE ON AUG. 23. PHOTO BY LOGAN PAYNE.

Parque as a labor of love and success for the land trust. They also alluded to an ongoing project, a housing development called the San Pablo Cottages across the street from the San Pablo park in a triangle of vacant land.

Finally, Lopez-Schmidt addressed a new investment system that South Tower Community Land Trust has committed to. Earlier in the morning, Jocelyn Suarez urged that the community should go beyond simply addressing that we are on stolen native land.

"Our organization has decided that we're not just going to acknowledge that this happened, but we're going to invest in restoring the native communities in our area," Lopez-Schmidt said. "Our policy that we set in our workload is that 10% of the land, of everything that our organization purchases and owns will donate back to an indigenous organization."

The South Tower Community Land Trust made their first donation to the Sierra Tribal Consortium some weeks prior to the housing summit.

Classes

Classrooms in the OAB were filled with presenters from all around the community, focusing on different topics like immigrant safety, housing and other issues that may seem to make spaces more difficult to live in.

One panel discussion, "Beyond Barriers 2SLGBTQIA+ Leaders in Housing," was organized by Ray McPherson. The panel's goal was to create a safe space for women and LGBTQIA+ members.

"It is hard being queer in a professional setting, it's harder than just being a woman in housing," McPherson said. "You can be a professional and also be out and queer, and we can tell you, guide you, answer your questions and be your support."

McPherson organized with other queer professionals from all kinds of housing agencies and coalitions across California. They each had a unique perspective to share, but one theme untied their answers self advocacy.

"My team, I have a lot of 20-something, early 30-something staff members who ask a lot of questions, who push back a lot, and in the greatest way," Sarah Buchanan said executive vice president of the San Diego Housing Federation. "It brings

opportunity to have real conversations."

Pedro Galvao, the strategic initiatives and policy advisor at California's Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, reflected on his experience as a job recruiter. He said it's important that people vocalize their differences.

"It was just really important at those forums to be visibly queer, to talk about your experience as a queer person so folks could see themselves and feel welcomed. I remember when I was starting out that was really important to me, and did leadership talk about their experiences? Did leadership have experiences that reflected my experience?" Galvao said.

Art Pieces

Around the OAB were poster boards with different printed art pieces from queer artists around the world. One of these artists was Vishinna Turner, board vice president of the South Tower Community Land Trust.

"It is wonderful to have all of the artwork mixed in with housing because what makes your community better? Having everyone express themselves and be creative in their outlet," Turner said.

Each art piece displayed in the OAB was photographed and compiled for posterity in a companion booklet called "More Than Mere Existence." According to Turner's page in the book, her art piece is about "society's inability to digest Black culture, specifically picking apart things it likes and discarding the rest."

Students at FCC and members of the Aleño Dance Project put on a performance at noon in the auditorium. According to the Queer Housing Summit website, the dance told a powerful story about grounding, resistance and self-discovery. The dance acted as a tribute to Yemaya, a deity of the Yoruba people.

At the end of the day, there was a performance by "The Splash 'Queens,'" a local group of drag queens. According to the Queer Housing Summit website, their performance was a tribute to the communities that make housing justice possible, and a reminder that celebration is part of the revolution.

THE FRESNO CITY COLLEGE DANCE TEAM GOES NATIONAL

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The dance team from Fresno City College received

national recognition from the American College Dance Association earlier this month at a historic annual showcase held in Beckett, Massachusetts from Feb.19 to Feb. 22.

Two pieces from Fresno City College were selected. One was "Chasm of Paradoxes," by student choreographer, Jacob Gasca. The other was from a guest choreographer.

Dance major Haley Gilpin said each year, the American College Dance Association hosts a program where colleges from all over the nation go to other conferences hosted in various locations. For Gilpin and the rest of the students in her dance group, their journey began in Modesto, Calif.

Each college is required to bring either one or two choreographed performances or, "pieces."

At the end of the conference, the adjudicators select the top 10 pieces they believe best represent and showcase the current creative climate in colleges.

"What happened for the first time in present FCC history, both of our pieces made it into the Gala," Gilpin said. "One student and one guest choreographer."

Gilpin said out of the 10 groups, the top three were selected and then sent to nationals.

"The guest choreographer piece was selected to go to nationals in the top three," Gilpin said. "Then we had our student choreographer piece that was selected as an alternate."

According to Gilpin, May is when the group made their way to Washington D.C. for nationals. It was held at Georgetown University.

"All of these top threes from the different regions all go to this one place," Gilpin said. "Then it's the top 33 pieces from across the country."

Then came nationals, which Gilpin described not so much as a competition, but a showcase or presentation of all the pieces that had been selected.

"So Jacob's Pillow is the next step," Gilpin said. "And that is now outside of collegiate level dance. That is the professional world."

"So it was like, thing after thing, and we didn't even think we'd make it in the Gala," Gilpin said. "I mean, it was insane."

Gilpin explained that many modern and contemporary styles of dance were featured at the event, such as hip-hop, theatrical dance performances and cultural pieces.

The adjudicators of the event held a feedback session where the dancers were able to hear their notes on their performances.

"I almost started crying," Gilpin said. "They were saying how there was something different about how we performed and the reason we got selected was because of the connection to each other and to what we do."

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(LEFT TO RIGHT) LAUREN NISHIMOTO, (BACKGROUND) OLYVIA STAFFORD, HALEY GILPIN, (FOREGROUND) AUSTIN CHAN, EDEN MOUA AND JACOB GASCA PERFORM "DISCONNECT" ON APR. 9. PHOTO BY MIKE MIGUEL.