



## Home is a Feeling

Rosanna Valencia

Visual Artist, Urban Planner, Architectural Designer

## Abstract

Through storytelling and digital paintings, Rosanna Valencia recreates memories of her immigrant experiences, reflecting on both her native country, the Dominican Republic, and the place in which she resides: New York. Words and images are used to showcase alternative realities to isolation and displacement. Windows and openings in her art show the realities of time and seasonality, while the interior spaces anchor the viewer in a nonlinear reality where time can stand still, and loops can be reopened and closed.

**Keywords:** Migration, memory, place and space, home, Dominican Republic, Monte Plata, New York City.

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It's move-in day. She places her mattress on the floor and decides to rest after a long day. Her floor-to-ceiling windows appear to give her a seamless connection to the outdoors. She's joyful and relaxed. Eight years on a housing waiting list amounted to this moment. She's finally no longer living in a shared, rat-infested apartment. She feels secure and comfortable. Finally, she can find peace, but at the cost of isolation. Finally, she has a place where she can dream.

She had spent the entire day on her feet, deep cleaning grease stains from her Tupperware and dishes. She has always been preoccupied with getting new home items, but only when the time was right. She had saved up what she could from her minimum wage salary, all for this grand moment, but when the time finally came, she could only afford to spend on new linen and bath accessories. Soaking the dishes in some Clorox, soap, and water solution did the trick. Having new, clean items would symbolise a new chapter in her life. Her previous residences never quite felt like home without her personal belongings, without her own inscriptions and sense of ownership of her items. One time, she decided to save the yellow flower from decorations at her job as a reminder that more moments like this would soon be abundant, and to look forward to a time when she could have her plants. Sometimes, she laments not having put up a Christmas tree since migrating from the Dominican Republic ten years ago. Her connection with faith had faded as the demands of work grew, community felt hard to find, and home was a constant pursuit. Family photos were best if kept neatly in the manila folder under the mattress. One day, she would have the wall space and own armatures to display them with dignity.

Preserved in her photo album is a candid memory of her sisters and her neighbours enjoying *domplines* at the cookout gathering for her farewell – a memory only possible because of her niece's curiosity and interest in new



Rosanna Valencia, *Home is a Feeling 1/3*, 2024.  
Digital painting, 11 x 14 in.

technologies. All hands on deck to shape the dough for the dish, consisting of white flour dumplings cooked in tomato sauce and salami. A convenient dish, that besides being known to easily satiate hunger, is a ritual for sharing joys. It is prepared under the remains of the *enramada* in her late grandmother's yard, with the intention of wishing her luck on her journey. The space is embedded with the burden of family secrets and painful events, and is rarely visited. But preparation of the *domplinada* keeps everyone laughing, busy, and full.



Rosanna Valencia, *Home is a Feeling 2/3*, 2024.  
Digital painting, 11 x 14 in.

While surrounded by luxurious views of Billionaires' Row and the warm haze of golden hour, she dreamed about how she would decorate her new space. Her home was now clean, a place that she had control over and, most importantly, was real. Her red-eared slider, usually found under a light that simulates the sun, basks without perhaps knowing the difference between inside and outside, stretching its legs in the most comfortable ballerina pose. For a turtle, home is always on its back.

She thought about what it would be like to have a kitchen cabinet reminiscent of her grandmother's time, a piece of history that carries the story of survival and resilience in her lineage. She thought about her grandmother, who, after enduring her abusive husband, defied all odds by opening a small market to bring in her own income and finally was able to purchase her own plot of land. She journeyed for miles on foot to secure and transport the wood, ultimately laying the foundation of what would be the new home for her seven daughters. The next shipment of her belongings had finally arrived. The hallways of her new home are covered with protective carpet and flooring, and the luggage carrier, brought up by building staff, was conveniently nearby to assist her move as she took her trip down the service elevator. Outside by the curb are discarded treasures left by families that had moved out. Surprised by their pristine condition, she marvelled at the opportunity to give them new life as part of her new home decor. She takes notice of event postings, amenities and features of her new community. For a semi-annual fee of almost the price of her monthly rent, she could access the pool, yoga room, library, cooking classes, holiday events, and even host her private events on the roof deck with the grill and built-in dog park.

Distinct chatter reverberates through the walls and her living room window, interrupting her peace. She decides to control her privacy by closing her new curtains. She asserts herself and begins a journey to define her home. Items usually not seen together demand to be on display, for these items are a testament to her personal journey. Home is a place where she can reclaim her dignity. Even when migration has separated her from her loved ones, she strives to create a sense of home within herself and her surroundings. Home is a feeling that she must conjure up when everything else around her insists that she has nothing.



Rosanna Valencia, *Home is a Feeling 3/3*, 2024.  
Digital painting, 11 x 14 in.



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