

## Publication that trains the poor is a survivor?

**We are people who believe that not only is no human being illegal, but that all these borders are false constructs**

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Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia leaps from the floor onto a nearby chair excitedly in the cramped but cozy offices of [POOR Magazine](#). She wields a small, black megaphone and sports hot pink Nike high-tops and a cabbie hat.

"We have a bidding war!" she yells to the audience. "I have two-fifty! Do I hear three

dollars?" All this for a drawing her son, Tibu, drew "when he was bored." This is just one example of the items up for grabs at POOR Magazine's Web Launch Party and "Loud Ghetto-Fabulous (Not Silent) Auction" held on Friday, Aug. 27.

Throughout the night, it becomes clear that this auction isn't meant to raise significant financial support for POOR Magazine and its efforts to support low- to no-income individuals. "It's a family," says Muteado Silencio, who's been volunteering at POOR as a co-teacher and artist since 2003. "It just fills your heart."

Looking around the room plastered with various posters, paintings, scribbles and fliers, it's filled with smiling faces — black, white, Latino; it doesn't matter. They all have something in common: they're all poor and they're all members of the POOR family.

POOR Magazine was founded by Gray-Garcia and her mother, Dee Gray, in 1996. The mother and daughter duo drove up from Los Angeles to San Francisco, where their poverty became a reason to make art and to become activists for poor people. Through Gray-Garcia's research on grants, the two received funding from the San Francisco Art Commission and the Vanguard Foundation to put out the first edition of POOR Magazine. POOR has come a long way since those first days.

"Basically there are three strands," Gray-Garcia explains, "media, education and art." Through each of these strands the nonprofit seeks to give access to poor individuals — those who would be without resources otherwise. It does so by

producing media to raise awareness of poor individuals, teaching low- to no-income people how write and become media producers and creating a space for them to express and display their art.

“Some of these women are naturally gifted,” Silencio says. “I just encourage them.” Silencio, who came to the United States from Mexico when he was 6 years old, teaches a course called “Voices of Immigrants in Resistance,” though he shies away from being called “teacher,” saying, “we are all teachers and students.”

“You see all these negative ways our people get talked about in the media,” he says. The intention with the class is to “take the media back and give it to the people.” For seven years Silencio has been involved with POOR, giving voices to those who are unheard because “nobody listens to them.”

As for what Silencio is giving back at the auction, he sits in the front of the room in the corner, thumping a drum to the rhythm of whatever is happening: a poetry recitation, Gray-Garcia’s auctioneering, Spanish interpretation. He also auctions off an original piece of art, joking that he’ll take a BART pass in exchange for his artwork.

Whether by bus, car, or their own two feet, many POOR family members have showed up for the auction, enjoying one another’s company and a potluck-style buffet. One of them is Carina Lomeli, who began volunteering for POOR in 2008 and now serves on the staff administrating, painting murals, handling logistics and more. At the auction, she records bid wins on a Hello Kitty clipboard and helps with Spanish interpretation.



“I wanted somewhere to volunteer to help my people...la Raza,” Lomeli said. The Academy of Art graduate began translating and helping out at workshops with POOR. A few months later Gray-Garcia offered Lomeli a regular job. Her hope is to organize the administrative end of POOR’s programs so that anyone who may later fill her shoes will

have a solid structure to work with.

Lomeli recognizes the difficulty with having an organization by and for poor people. “We became very, very broke saving up for the U.S. Social Forum,” which took place June 22-26 of this year in Detroit, Michigan. There were times

when Gray-Garcia and the rest were wondering if they would be able to pay the rent for their office space at 16th and Mission streets.

Thankfully, donors came to the rescue so that POOR's doors could remain open.

And not only that, POOR also just launched their new website—a desperately-needed update from their old site. “It moved us out of digital apartheid,” said Gray-Garcia into her tiny megaphone. With her toothy grin, she explains to her POOR family at the auction how this new easily navigable site is a form of resistance in that it gives digital access to the poor — those who may not have it otherwise. “It’s our little slice of digital real estate.”

Just a week before the auction, POOR Magazine was locked into a visually unappealing and static website that didn’t allow them flexibility. The new site is colorful and much easier to navigate. Thanks to two eager volunteers, POOR has been able to make this switch at little cost. However, Lomeli said that POOR’s budget struggles earlier this summer and the website launch were “coincidental.”

However much money was raised at the “Loud Auction,” Gray-Garcia, Silencio, Lomeli and the rest of the family don’t seem preoccupied with that.

“At POOR we work to counter notions of separation in society,” Gray-Garcia said. “We work in real-time to try to become the solution.” Clad in a white blazer (decorated with words, scribbles and names in permanent marker) and hoop earrings, she is a revolutionary. POOR may have struggled with near-bankruptcy in the past, but if Gray-Garcia’s grit and determination have anything to do with it, it won’t be closing its doors anytime soon, especially with the help of its many volunteers.

Silencio knows that it takes an army of volunteers for a program like POOR to flourish. “If you water the plant, you see the fruit.”