

Photography student explores cultural legacy through his lens

By Sarah Marie Brazeal, ASU News
December 1, 2025

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [fall 2025 graduates](#).

For Nicolas Morley, who graduates this fall with a BFA in photography from the School of Art, the path to photography began with a moment of clarity late in high school.

"It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to major in," he says. "I chose photography because it was the only thing that really made sense to me."

His acceptance into the "Emerge Exhibition" at Art Intersection in 2020 showed him that photography could be more than a passion — it could be a career. And after transferring to Arizona State University from the University of Arizona to be closer to home, he also discovered that the boundaries of photography are far more fluid than he once believed.

"Something I learned — and am still learning every day — is that photography as art can look so different depending on the artist," he says. "I came into art school thinking it had to look or be a certain way, but there are so many ways to experiment with it that it can really look however you want it to look."

That spirit of exploration defines Morley's creative process and his outlook on the future. While his next steps are still open-ended, his goals remain centered around creativity and discovery.

"I don't have a definite plan yet," he says, "but I'm looking at grad school or continuing my creative endeavors on my own. Whether it's photography or something else, I want to stay in a creative space — with sure plans of seeing as much of the world as possible."

Benjamin Timpson, associate professor in the School of Art, says that Morley's art "bridges scholarship and lived experience, affirming the role of artists as cultural historians and advocates for collective memory and connection."

Morley's current body of work explores the history and cultural legacy of the vaquero and charrería traditions, tracing their evolution from Spanish colonialism to their place in contemporary Mexican and Mexican American identity.

“Through rigorous research and visually compelling storytelling, Nicolas reveals how creativity and resilience have shaped cultural continuity and belonging across generations,” Timpson says. “Nicolas approaches this subject with intellectual depth, sensitivity and an evident passion for amplifying underrepresented narratives.”

As Morley prepares for graduation, he reflects on his journey as an artist, the lessons he’s learned at ASU and what lies ahead after earning his BFA in photography.

Question: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

Answer: I would say Ben Timpson taught me a lot, not necessarily formalities but he really pushes his students to be experimental and to have fun while creating. Which goes back to what I said about realizing all the ways photography can look. He’s always super positive and loves helping students take their ideas to the next level.

Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?

A: I would say just keep going, to push through the creative burnout, and to not stress so much. This is the time to be experimental and learn. I don’t think anything you do within your classes has to be perfect so long as you try.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: Some spots I like to study or do homework in are the computer lab on the ground floor of Coor (Hall). I love the tall ceilings and dark atmosphere, and there was always a computer nook open. Or the terrace at the MU (Memorial Union) — I would always eat lunch or do homework between classes there, weather permitting. It was never too crowded and always pretty quiet.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: This is a pretty complex question. I don’t know if I could decide on one sure thing at the moment but something to do with our planet and wildlife protection for sure. After all, I think we mistreat nature and the occupants of it too much. Perhaps something to do with the rehabilitation of endangered/overly hunted species or finding more self-sustaining solutions to our everyday lives and communities in an attempt to heal the planet we’re already destined to destroy.

Read more

For more School of Art stories, visit art.asu.edu/news.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Nicolas Morley

Gallery









