

Delcy Morelos

(Born in 1967 in Tierralta, Colombia. Lives and works in Bogotá, Colombia)

Paisaje (Landscape), 2021

I was born in Tierralta, Córdoba, a small town near the coast of the Colombian Caribbean Sea, a region severely affected by multiple forms of violence. Tierralta has been, and continues to be, a territory in conflict. The paramilitary forces of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), who own vast areas of land, have committed numerous and horrific killings. The atrocities occur on a daily basis, happening so often that we as a society have become numb, slowly losing our capacity to be shocked and react. I grew up in this bloody and painful frame, on the brink between life and death, as a witness who can only wonder: is cruelty inherent to being human?

During my childhood, I lived with my paternal grandmother of Indigenous descent. She grew and harvested almost everything that we ate in her yard. Her skin was the color of soil, the same earthy soil with which the floors and the walls of her house were made. The outdoor landscape blended with the interior of the house; there was no defined line between the inside and the outside. To prevent our house from becoming too dusty, we would moisten the soil with our hands, making circular movements until we had covered the entire surface of the floor. We performed this noble task daily, on our knees.

To have this kind of close and profound relationship with the soil is an experience that is vanishing from people's lives. In large cities, soil gets buried under endless layers of concrete. Children are unaware of the origin of the food that nourishes them. A large portion of humanity has developed a relationship with nature that is based on submission, exploitation, oppression, brutality, and contempt. In that sense, we humans become not-nature and perceive ourselves as detached from it. When our planet is treated as nothing more than a supplier of natural resources, we deplete and destroy Mother Earth. We have lost all sensibility and empathy towards our environment. We no longer know what earth is and no longer recognize its essence, its power, or its magic. This lack of recognition leads us to destroy and degrade it, unaware that we are simultaneously destroying and degrading ourselves.

Since 2012, my artwork has been aligned with the cosmovision of ancestral Andean and Amazonian cultures. Isaías Román, a wise Uitoto tribesman of the Colombian Amazon, has shared knowledge and insight that has been kept alive and carefully guarded over generations by many Indigenous tribes. Due to the overwhelming pressure of violence in the Amazonian territory, Isaías and his family, like many others, had to flee their home in the jungle to take refuge in the big city. Through his guidance, I continue to build on the

teachings that began during my upbringing with my grandmother. He teaches me how his culture's Creation Myths embody a philosophy of life. He does so via oral history and by teaching me physical experiences that range from the act of giving and receiving, to the practice of making things with one's own hands: weaving, clay-kneading, wood-carving, preparing colors, and painting. Each of these tasks contain a rich symbology. For the Uitoto, the universe is "a basket into which everything that exists is woven," meaning that the life of every human being is intertwined: we are all part of a delicate and powerful web of existence.

I'm interested in eliminating the distinctions between painting, sculpture, and installation; between volume and surface; and between interior and exterior spaces by making works that navigate, observe, feel, walk, and penetrate each other, using only a few materials and a single color. Exposed, infinite, and raw. To be in touch with the earth, and to enter within it, is to be in touch with what constitutes and nourishes us. Art allows for the possibility, both real and mythical, to create moments and spaces that are sacred.

— Delcy Morelos, March, 2021. Translated by Fernando Garavito.

Note:

The soil in this piece was harvested by artist Helen Mirra and curator Juana Berrío in Muir Beach, California. Since Morelos was not able to travel to San Francisco for the production of this commissioned work (the first one in the U.S.), the piece was produced by Berrío with the help of local people who followed Morelos's daily instructions from Bogotá, Colombia. Inspired by Morelos' desire to use local soil for the production of her piece for this exhibition at / Slash Art, Mirra invited Berrío on a short hike near her home in the Muir beach Overlook to look for it. With a bucket in hand and two small shovels, they found and harvested a small batch of deep brown clay soil from the hill. This bucket of dark soil, combined with organic cocoa powder, organic ground cloves, water, and a couple of blocks of dark red brown clay used by local potters, covered the multiple layers of burlap that made up the body of *Paisaje (Landscape)*.