

# Maria Luisa de Villa

## Artists Statement

### Llama Project

I draw inspiration from nature, the spirit of the land, the majestic Canadian forests, the Mexican earth of many colors and Mexican myths.

The equation: land/flora/habitat/morada/migration/place, is central in my work. The experience of a constant migration between Mexico and Canada, motivates me to explore the idea of a notion of place and connection to the natural world, while finding a symbolic identification with the image of the migratory movement of the monarch butterfly, a direct and perhaps the most beautiful link between my two habitats.

By unfolding traditional forms such as the huipíl Mexican women's costume, the ofrenda installation in Mexican popular art or simply a clay water pot, I draw a series of visual correspondences that explore the complex relationships that exist between nature, culture and my own lived experiences.

In the series Trópicos eternos, the drawings on three sheets of amate handmade paper, become large scale paper huipiles as they take on the triptych form of the huipil woven in three panels on a back strap loom. The small handmade papers layered over the large amates, contain hidden and exposed images and markings evoking the layers of natural and cultural history that shape the land. This idea of layering also alludes to the image of the washed huipiles when hung to dry in the sun or to the image of handmade papers as they hang in rows waiting for air to complete the papermaking process.

My ofrenda installation work, celebrates life and nature, it resonates with a sense of the land and a notion of place, the ancestral memory found in the layers of history shaping the land. For me, this memory persists in those magical spaces of respect and beauty that nourish the soul and enlighten us to comprehend our natural and cultural evolution intimately linked to the aesthetics of place such as: Yagul, Mitla, Tepeyac, the monarch butterfly sanctuaries, the forest of Northern Ontario, or simply in a ravine in San Agustin ETLA or the untouched beaches along the Mexican blue Pacific Coast.

In the series: Ollas and in Magueyes, the water pots made from black clay or from the Oaxaca red earth, allude to a woman, they are also wombs, vessels containers of life.

The sacred icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a powerful collective image for Mexicans, is a recurrent image in my work perhaps due to its immediate identification with a profound Mexican sentiment. She is a mestiza, made of Amerindian and European substances.

With the confident flight of the Monarch butterfly, in ritual migration monarca papalótl and I return each year to the morada of our ancestors, which is also the morada of Guadalupe-Tonantzin, mi tierra, where day follows night on the millenary design of the petate while the Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl volcanoes caress each other beneath the earth. It is a return to our

origins, to the land of the chapulines, the song of the cenzontle, the conch seashell and the triptych huipiles. We return to the place of the beautiful baroque ofrendas and laughing sugar skulls, the tezontle red earth, and that of Mitla red, the white calla lilies, the yellow cempasúchil and the black copal.

The art of gardening which I learned in Canada, taught me the joy of working with soil from preparing it in the Autumn for spring. Playing with the different green tones and textures of plants to create a scene that can later achieve its own transformation into a winter garden, is a challenge as in art. I see the garden as a metaphor, a space between the cultivated world and the natural one, a border between two worlds.

I understand art as a space for encounter, dialogue and in this sense, drawing is a thinking and feeling from. Paper is a prime element in my work. On the surface of the colors, aromas and textures of tropical forest, cacti and flowers pressed into handmade paper, my drawings open up a garden, an imaginary landscape inhabited by images of agaves, mountains, goddesses and butterflies caught in a timeless sensual rhythm. My drawing explores process, it is a form of comprehending life and the world that surrounds me, *un camino*, a continuous discovery of my own relationship with the land and its interconnected entities."

#### **GLOSSARY:**

Mitla, Yagul, PreHispanic ceremonial centres  
*Ofrenda*, (Span), offering, ritual art installation  
*Papalótl*, (Nah), butterfly  
*Morada*, (span), purple, abode, dwelling, sanctuary  
*Mi tierra*, (Span), my land, my country of origin  
*Petate*, (Nah-Span), straw matt for sleeping, burial  
*Cenzontles*, grayish small bird with many sounds

*Chapulines*, (Nah), crickets  
*Huipil*, (Nah), Mexican women's dress  
*Tezontle*, (Nah), red volcanic stone  
*Cempasúchil*, (Nah-Span), marigold flower  
*Copal*, (Nah), bark and resin incense  
*Un camino*, (Span), a way, a road