

What to do when the Jaguar glows blue

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Mexican artist Lorena Silva is in Whitehorse to participate in the Llama Project. The internationally-renowned artist's work will be shown starting November 5 at the Yukon Arts Centre.

What do pottery, genetically modified corn and a glowing blue Jaguar have in common?

All, in one way or another, inspire Mexican artist/activist Lorena Silva.

Silva is visiting the territory this month as part of the LLAMA (The Listen, Learn and Make Art) Project.

Silva is an artist of international renown, whose work has been exhibited throughout Mexico, Europe and Canada.

Her painting was highlighted at Expo '86 in Vancouver.

Silva has since moved on to more sculptural and ceramic-based work and recently took part in a ceramic symposium in Beijing.

While Silva will be exhibiting her work at the Yukon Arts Centre next month, and has been giving talks and workshops, she would also like to focus on some of the social causes that she's championing.

Jaguar de Luz

The hunter had the jaguar in his sights.

This particular animal had been killing a lot of the local farm animals in the area.

Of course, the community had begun to encroach on the jaguar's jungle territory, claiming more and more land for farming.

But this was to ensure that its people didn't starve.

The community, like many other communities in the south of Mexico's state of Oaxaca, was finding it impossible to subsist in traditional ways.

So they reclaim the jungle for agriculture and produce coffee and the jaguar's habitat shrinks.

As the hunter was about to pull the trigger, he noticed something strange: the jaguar was glowing with a blue light.

The indigenous people have long revered the jaguar, which plays a large part in local mythology.

Many believe the jaguar to be a kind of reincarnation of their grandparents and elders.

"It's a jaguar that shines, a jaguar of light," explained the astonished local people.

"It's a signal to us. The Earth is angry."

The village decided not to kill the animal and trapped it instead, taking it to a nearby zoo.

Silva and a number of other artists, including LLAMA artists Maria Luisa de Villa and Cristina Luna, decided to do something about this wild animal now living in captivity.

They created artwork and sold it at auction, hoping to raise enough money to have the large cat returned to the wild.

They also created a documentary film showcasing the project to save the jaguar as well as the many problems that have led to this standoff between man and jungle.

Silva will be showing this documentary at 7 P.M. on October 27, at l'Association franco-yukonnaise.

Genetically Modified Corn

Corn makes up a huge part of the North American diet in one form or another.

The ubiquitous grain originally came from Mexico, which once had an incredibly diverse selection of the stuff.

There are many different types of corn or maize, and it comes in a range of different colours besides the standard yellow that you might think of.

But this diversity is being threatened by genetically modified corn, which jumped the border from the US and began popping up in Mexico.

Silva is a member of a group of 48 female artists who either are or have been working in Oaxaca and have been inspired to protest the onslaught of genetically modified corn.

They are doing this by creating works of art that communicate the culture of maize - a huge part of the local tradition.

A discussion on modified corn, sustainable food and fair trade issues will also be held on Tuesday.

Battling Globalization

If you think that cheap plastic goods are ruining our culture, try being an indigenous artisan in Oaxaca, Mexico.

In Oaxaca, plastic goods have displaced locally produced goods and handicrafts.

With no market to sell their wares, these artisans, mostly indigenous people, are losing touch with traditional designs and techniques.

To make matters worse, political turmoil in Oaxaca over the last few years has deterred a lot of visitors to the state from both within Mexico and abroad.

Without tourists, it is extremely difficult to sell traditional wares.

In response to this Silva and her partner have started a studio called Los Alacranes.

The studio strives to work with local artisans to find additional markets for their work.

And, because many of the local craftspeople have a tendency to create the same thing over and over again, Silva and her partner try to help them learn to create exciting new designs and products.

The LLAMA Project is a collaboration between Mexican and Canadian artists, organized by local artist Joyce Majiski.

To learn more about Silva, the project and the other LLAMA artists, check out the website at <http://www.llamaproject.com>.

The LLAMA's exhibition, Voz/Voice: The arts of resistance and resilience, will be showing at the Yukon Arts Centre November 5 to December 22.

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