

INTI RAYMI

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Master of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

Inti Raymi refers to the ancient Incan festival that celebrated and honored the sun. In a similar fashion these works spanning across the room, are a homage towards aspects of Ecuadorian culture. The colors found in these paintings are based on typical Ecuadorian clothing, folklore, and traditional practices of shamanism.

Using intuition as a primary guide, Inti Raymi becomes a dialogue between subconscious mark making and a newly found interest in Ecuadorian heritage and plant medicine.

At its core this series is an exploration of personal identity, and building a new language of painting while researching ways of healing from traditional medicinal practices found in Ecuador/Peru.

INTRODUCTION

There has always been a desire to help. Showing its roots, as a career in law enforcement was considered during the start of high school. Working in New York City as a police officer seemed to be the best location to help those who needed it. This plan changed course after ingesting cannabis at the age of fifteen.

This body of work comes from a personal interest in returning to Ecuadorian culture and healing practices. Based on researching plant medicine, specifically entheogens, healing practices and family traditions, six paintings were intuitively painted. A visual dialogue capturing communication between intuitive mark making and the subconscious mind influenced by gaining further knowledge on Ecuadorian plant medicine.

Cannabis, considered a “mini” entheogen, opened a doorway into seeing law enforcement practices negatively, leading to a personal pursuit in the arts. Furthering an interest that was always kept in the periphery. An entheogen is a substance that alters the consciousness, providing visionary experiences for the user that can be insightful for their life and their community. Used traditionally in cultures around the world, the use of this form of medicine can be found throughout history. (Statmens 47).



(Figure 1) *Cutting the ayahuasca root*

These healing practices remain active still to this day for healing in areas of the world such as Siberia, Peru and

Ecuador.(Healing with Plant-Spirits). Traditionally used for healing of the body, disease, spiritual alignment, and energetic imbalances. Ayahuasca stands out as a medicine of choice and is considered sacred.

Ayahuasca ceremonies typically rely on a “shaman” (a healer) to guide the patients who also drink the brew, both receiving visions from the plant. The guide in this state of consciousness uses these visions as a tool to uncover misalignments in the patient's body, not able to be seen through typical means. A relationship between the plants and the shaman is essential. Fasting and isolation are practices used in ceremonial preparation and for respecting the medicine (Harner). Healing doesn't take place overnight, in most cases it's gradual, slowly revealing its effects, sometimes going unnoticed.

Entheogens have also been used for methods of survival. Hunters sometimes need the ability to communicate between individuals and animals. The natives heighten their senses to help detect and evade potential predators such as a black jaguar.(Calvo). An altered state of consciousness in the rainforest is seen as a blessing not a hindrance. These substances are not perceived negatively but as a gift for acquiring food in a dangerous environment. (Harner, The way of the shaman). Peter Goreman, a renowned journalist, was one of the first to document a sensor enhancing entheogen, known as Kambo or Sapo (frog venom)



(Figure 2) *Kambo being collected*

Sapo is used to enhance vision , hearing, and motor skills to assist in a hunter acquiring food for their village. While skeptics doubt the legitimacy of these practices, traditions such as “egg”cleansing and herbal “cleaning” remain strong.



(Figure 3) *Cleansing/Limpieza with herbs in Cuenca, Ecuador*

Family members have gone to these shamans who use these plants to help uncover ailments which are hard to identify. An Uncle was cured after receiving help from a shaman who discovered a buried photograph intended to curse and do harm.

There is a stigma to using these substances for healing, attributing to dangerous drug abuse. Illegal in the United States, this form of medicine and healing is looked down upon, even with new studies proving its benefits in one's recovery.

In contrast, one of the most dangerous drugs Alcohol, is promoted and accepted socially. Following a career in law enforcement would have contradicted current beliefs and the paintings made for this body of work. In turn harm would have been given to those seeking alternative medicine. Participating in the justice system would have ironically gone against ancestral means of healing.

This body of work symbolically explores a return to personal heritage and culture. Guided by the use of cannabis at a young age, a misaligned career was evaded. Leading to this very thesis, paying homage to the spirits that inhabit these plants.

A deeper appreciation for Ecuadorian culture formed throughout the creations of these paintings, while also gaining a new sense of self. With a renewed identity, once avoided by being engulfed in American culture, painting, an unexplored medium, serves as a vehicle of self-transformation.

The need to let go and move forward was essential for the process of these paintings. Moving on from comfortability with ink mark making to colorfully intuitive brush strokes. This process seeks to capture an unseen world, what's all around, in the air. What is hidden from the human eye. The phrase "close your eyes, now you can see" echoes the essence of this thesis.

Influences/Background

Music

Practicing music on a regular basis directly affects the artwork. Informing the composition, process and design. The foundation of music such as rhythm, silences, improvisation and counterpoint present themselves through marks made on canvas. Due to continuous practice of the guitar over many years, the ability to improvise drawings without erasing has improved.

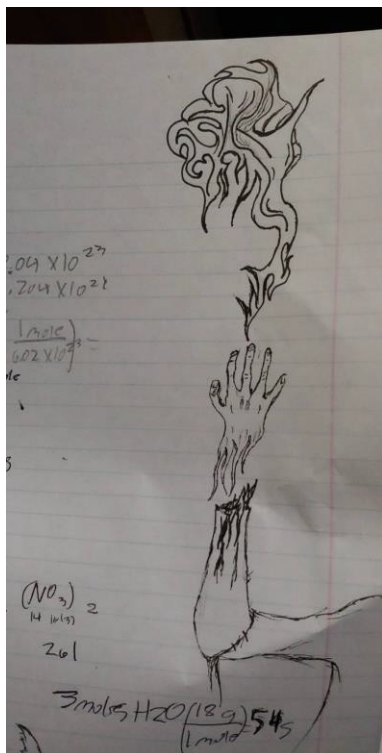


(Figure 4) *“Embrace” Ink on Paper*

At its core, improvisation remains at the heart of this process. Similar to a musician's inability to undo a note after being played, permanency is a key component in furthering the work. What is first seen as accidental while mark making is later realized as necessary. “Mistakes” are marks of guidance where intuition takes hold.

Start of Drawing

In high school, vandalizing classroom desks with ink pens stolen from Staples served as a surface for these drawings guided by intuition, known then as “doodles.” There was an immediate attraction in interpreting these “desk drawings” of possessing a horror aesthetic.



(Figure 5) *Drawing from high school*

At the time in high school, while under the influence of cannabis in an altered state of consciousness, a sensory feeling in the hand provided a sensation of guidance in completing a drawing. This “guidance” sets a personal foundation for future approaches while also building a sense of trust, faith and intuition. While this feeling isn't currently present, the philosophy of trusting one's instincts has only gotten stronger.

From an early age being exposed to the genre of horror in films by family members, left a lasting impression on my subconscious. The imagery found in these types of films seemed to naturally pour out onto paper during my time in high school. Unaware of the negative effects of consuming this graphic media, further interest, resulted in an awareness of personal fears.(Andrews)



(Figure 6) *Scene from the film Hostel directed by Eli Roth*

Films series' such as *Hostel*

(Figure 6) and *Saw* remain imprinted into the mind as the consumption of

these types of films revealed self-knowledge. The fear of being tortured against one's will. Both series depict visual body horror where victims are tortured in grotesque manners. Once viewed with ease, is now avoided due its graphic content and an

overbearing new sensitivity, unable to stomach the visuals shown on screen. This fear is tackled and addressed in the painting *Needles in My Mouth*. (Figure 12) The painting shows an abstract rendition of anesthetic needles being driven into flesh-like forms resembling the opening of the chest cavity.

Naturally this interest shifted from film to horror video games. Where there is a grander immersion into the world of the game itself. *Resident Evil* and *Dead Space* are video game series where the player encounters a horrific reality. The four series mentioned above all have body horror as a backbone to their story.

(Figure 7) *Creatures from the video games Resident Evil 7 and Dead Space*



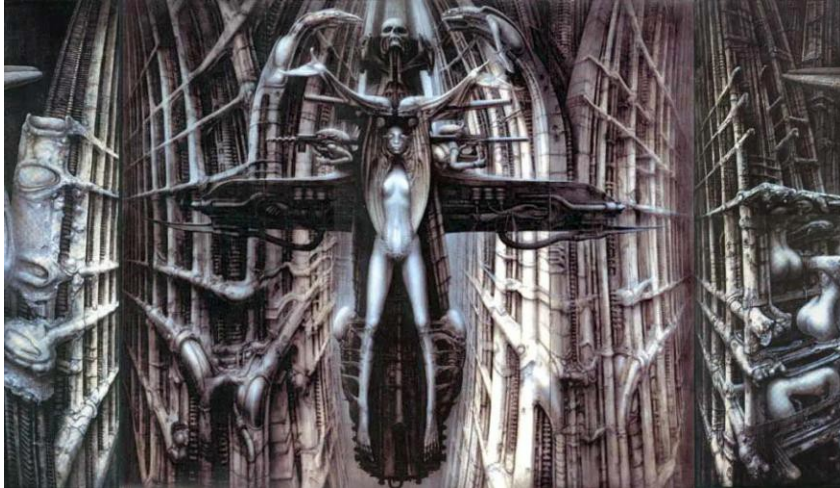


(Figure 8) *Jesus is Water, Ink on Paper*

The textures/forms found in the creatures from *Resident Evil* and *Dead Space II* have subconsciously influenced the appendage-like forms found in this thesis's paintings (Figure 7) (Figure 14). There is no intent in directly copying and using these forms found in the creatures but is naturally made and discovered through mark making (Figure 8). There is a biological attribute to

these alien-like creatures, not from this reality. This attraction to the unknown and rendering imagery possibly hidden from the naked eye, stems from seeing the beauty in these foreign out of this world types of creatures. The textures that form these creatures stand out, forming a basis for further interest in texture itself.

Texture and detailed line work made with graceful precision has been admired ever since childhood through an interest in the body horror genre. This admiration carries through with the influence of H.R Giger and his rendition of alien creatures. Known for his contribution to the film *Alien*, Giger's work is widely known, making itself present through tv screens. Elements of body horror are present through his work , containing ribbed like organic structures in his creature creations and environmental design. Through further visual research, Giger's visual vocabulary expands into biological forms that twist and turn.



(Figure 9) *The Spell* by H.R. Giger

This stylistic approach popularized an art style known as bio- mechanical. A style that depicts the fusion of living organisms with machines. His work embraces fantasy, an element that takes the viewer out of this reality, where these monsters aren't real. The paintings shown throughout this paper aim to mimic this feeling, giving the viewer a break from seeing the ordinary world.

(Figure 10) *The Triumph of Maximilian* by Albrecht Durer



These interests mentioned above lead to the appreciation of the German born artist Albrecht Durer, discovered while attending college for an undergrad degree in fine art. Lectures on Durer, showed his impact as one of the most influential German artists during the Renaissance. His large body of work spans from drawings, painting, poetry and printmaking. It was his attention to detail in his black and white prints that sparked initial interest in creating work with such precision (Figure 10). The elegance in his hatching and cross hatching signifies a steady hand, backed by patience. This virtue of patience found in Durer's work is sought after in my own paintings. Every painting in this thesis has taken more than a day to complete, sometimes a month. Without patience the art process in *Inti Raymi* would not be possible.

Patience and self-belief are essential to my process in painting. Self-doubt creeps in constantly, slipping through into the mind. The need for protection of this self-doubt led to a pursuit in reading self-help books. Realizing the importance of what you watch, hear and consume as a whole, the decision to seek this form of media, shifted subconscious mark making (Andrews *Psychic protection: Balance and protection for Body, Mind & spirit*). Graphic content has been replaced with self-affirming media, raising faith in the intuitive painting process. Books such as *A Course of Miracles* by Helen Schucman implemented affirmations that continue to serve in the completion of artwork.

Mantras in her book such as "There is nothing to fear, God is the light I see, God is the power within me" (Schucman) have left lasting impressions confirming a belief in spirituality. Learning about spirituality through these texts, furthered an interest in attempting to capture imagery from a world imperceptible by the human eye.

Lastly the choice to work on unstretched canvas manifested from painting on fabric for half a year, prior to the conception of this thesis.



(Figure 11) *Fabric Painting on Dickies Jacket*

Painting on unstretched canvas naturally felt right in progressing from past work to the completion of this thesis. Exploring unconventional surfaces to paint on, mirrors the research in alternative medicinal healing still practiced in Ecuador.

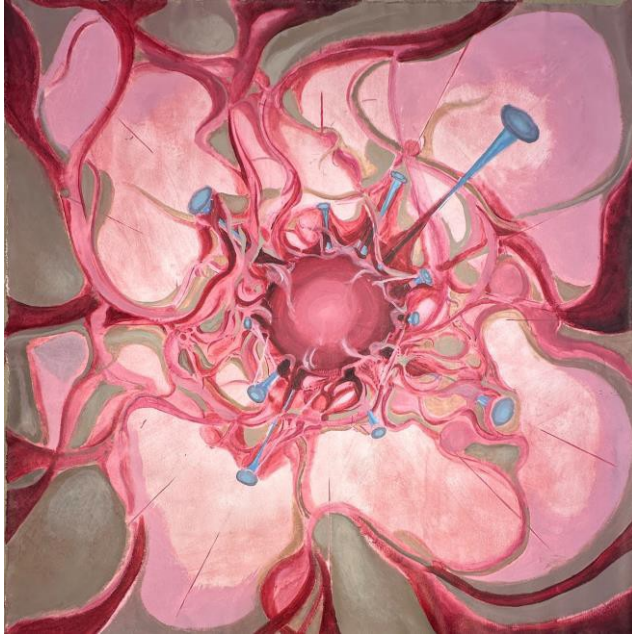
MAIN BODY PAINTINGS

The process in making the paintings for *Inti Raymi* follows common threads. The entire body of work is designed to be visceral and loud, to further immerse the viewer. Working on mural sized unstretched canvas emphasizes this desire to “yell” through painting. Purposeful application of details and texture are made to hold one's attention creating a sense of mesmer. Each is intuitively painted reflecting my subconscious mind while researching alternative healing practices, customs and beliefs from Ecuador.

Shifting and changing the orientation while applying layers to every painting were integral in completing the body of work. Canvases are pinned vertically to a wall, later to be laid flat horizontally like a piece of paper placed on a table. There is constant

movement in the positioning of the work, aiding in intuitive decision making.

NEEDLES IN MY MOUTH



(Figure 12) *Needles in My Mouth* , Acrylic on Unstretched Canvas

The premise for this painting originated from a desire to confront personal fears. Fears embedded by absorbing graphic content at a young age (Figure 6) led to the creation of an abstract representation of anesthetic needles being driven into the gums of a mouth.

Needles in my Mouth does not attempt to accurately depict this imagery but leaves room for a personal interpretation of the human cavity in which the needles are being driven into. The needles are painted in a similar fashion resembling hardware nails.

Flesh tones create a connection to the human psyche, further immersing the viewer into the painting. In saturating the colors used, a sense of levity was desired to resemble the positive affirmations gained in spiritual growth. Tendril-like forms mimic internal anatomy representing tension naturally found in the body. Creating this painting gave a similar cathartic experience as playing a horror based video game would (Figure 7).

AYA HUMA



(Figure 13) *Diablo Aya Huma, mask from Ecuador*

This three part series honors the spirit of *Aya Huma*. A folkloric Andean spirit known as a guide that serves to protect their community(Brasfield). Aya Huma is represented through a colorful mask,representing its uplifting nature. First seen in my youth, this mask has always appeared in community gatherings remaining unappreciated and overlooked. These colors are used in typical

Ecuadorian wares, vibrant reds, greens and blues.



(Figure 14) *Traditional Ecuadorian Cloths*

While leaving pockets of exposed canvas those three colors serve as a transparent base, where complementary hues are layered upon another.



(Figure 15) *Homecoming*, Acrylic on Unstretched Canvas

The painting named *Homecoming* is based in blue, being the first completed piece to be finished in the three part series. Keeping the representation of Aya Huma in mind, helped shape decision making in what felt like a puzzle to solve. Realizing this painting set a standard for the following two paintings aiming to achieve similar values, detail, and rhythm.



(Figure 16) *A Fire Inside.*

(Figure 17) *What's in the Air?*



The application of color was gradual and slow, intentionally saturated to not only resemble the Aya Huma mask but to also break away from traditional color

formulas taught in most art programs, where desaturated hues are imposed on the student. Dark values are used to push and pull forms giving shape and dimension, adding to the immersion effect. Color is used to resemble heritage, and a sense of rawness found in nature.

LUZ

The last two paintings in this body of work cover an intimate adoration for my grandmother known as Maria Luz Hortencia Parapi. Mamita Hortencia almost passed away this year , bringing much sorrow to my immediate family. My mother taught me everything about natural plant medicine which was passed down by my grandmother. She stands at my core belief in plant medicine, curing me of ailments with natural remedies.



(Figure 18) *Maria Luz Hortencia Parapi*



(Figure 19) *Maria holding lemongrass*



For this two part series there was an internal need to delineate from the process used in the Aya Huma Series(Figure 15) . A need for growth and exploration led to an opaque base lacking color. This stark contrast in preliminary bases from the previous series creates an overall aesthetic of progression and evolution bridging every painting together.

(Figure 20) *Maria Luz, Acrylic on*

Unstretched Canvas

Lastly the colors used in *Luz* are a direct reference to the traditional attire Maria Luz

wears (Figure 18). Bright and vibrant emanating light, the photographs of my grandmother were constantly looked at, in the same way the Aya Huma mask was observed while painting.

In contrast to the Aya Huma series, where paint brushes were used throughout the whole process, Luz's initial application of color was achieved through the use of steel palette knives acquired at Home Depot. This raised the speed of intuitive mark making which had always been slow when beginning a painting. The use of these palette knives furthers the theme of exploration having never been used in any body of work. This technique broadened texture patterns and was later used to inform the direction of brushstrokes.

CONCLUSION

A belief in an unseen world has been cemented in the competition of this body of work. Invisible to the human eye, this dimension seems accessible through faith, intuition and facing one's own fear or "shadow". Driven by faith and a determination to explore ways of pushing growth, *Inti Raymi* or "Festival of the Sun" celebrates change, mirroring personal development.

What was once seen as intimidating, painting has been a vessel to discovery. As knowledge was gained in researching Ecuadorian culture, confidence in applying paint heightened. Developing the paintings took me out of my comfort zone, being pushed by my professors to work in a large format, turned out to be the key element in producing the work.

Reflecting on the completion of this body of work, a greater connection to my ancestry has developed. Completing these six paintings have not only given me pride in my ability but in being Ecuadorian as well. Thank you so much to the professors who have guided me along the way, and to the spirits in the air who watch over me.

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