

El Espectador

The jungle portal by Carlos Jacanamijoy

By Diana Cardoso, June 4, 2018



Carlos Jacanamijoy poses next to his work of art; a rare occurrence over the course of his extensive career. / Nelso Sierra

When you ask Carlos Jacanamijoy a question, he sits there in silence before answering with the restraint of a person analysing where they might place a very important item. As he does so, he looks at the huge 5 x 6-metre jungle canvas covering the wall of the main room in Alonso Garcés Galería, the art gallery in Macarena, Bogota, as if the blue and green foliage were the source of all answers. His recent exhibition, *De naturaleza interior*, created within the framework of *Templos*, a series of exhibitions scheduled for 2018 to celebrate 40 years of Alonso Garcés Galería, consists of a large-format painting 'felt' in colour by the author, two smaller and horizontal monochromatic paintings and a video about the process. Jacanamijoy himself calls it 'the temple of Colombian and Latin American art.'

'I met Alonso Garcés almost 30 years ago when I was around 28 years old. I had exhibited at regional and national galleries. He started to follow my work there and invited me to exhibit,' says Jacanamijoy. 'Leading Colombian artists exhibited their work here. For example, *El mago del Caribe* by Obregón, drawings by Luis Caballero... I would go there when I was just a little pup, an art student, and I was enraptured by their work. When I was invited to exhibit my work, it was like a dream. I think that is where my career began. Now it is nice to pay homage to a place that was once a chapel - architecturally speaking - and which Alonso and Aseneth turned into a temple of art,' he says.

Carlos Jacanamijoy Tisoy is known for the colourful abstraction of his paintings, which have been exhibited half way around the world, but he is best known for being the most internationally-renowned artist of indigenous origin.

He graduated from the National University as a visual arts teacher, having focused on painting. However, he has done the maths and believes he has studied over 24 semesters of different degrees, including philosophy and architecture. He is always aware of the

El Espectador
The jungle portal by
Carlos Jacanamijoy

By Diana Cardoso,
June 4, 2018.

dilemma of subsistence, but is proud to note that he has always been a professional painter.

When I started studying, art was not viewed very favourably. At Sabana University, where I spent a couple of semesters, my classmates told me that they were the black sheep of their families,' he says with a laugh. 'In my case, I finished my baccalaureate, which hardly anybody did, and I went away to university. My father thought I was studying law because, in small towns, they called anyone who studied at university a "doctor" and, back then, people thought you were a doctor or lawyer, etc. That is why we've got a country of doctors in which everyone wants to be a president,' he concludes with a smile. His passion for painting has blinded him from the sometimes inhospitable and elitist world of visual arts in Colombia and he says that he naively chose his path and was guided by his love for creation, which was the only thing that mattered to him.

'Colombia is undoubtedly a country of social climbers, but I don't care. Art needs to be rebellious and search for a unique language that guides one on a clear and individual path. When I graduated from university, it was like starting from scratch. I thought about the great artists. Rivera's work was inspired by indigenous people, Picasso saw Africa, Van Gogh looked East... They all looked overseas, but what did I want to tell the world? Why shouldn't I look inwards? I thought about the Inga side of my family, about that childhood with my grandmother, about my love for painting and the natural world.' And that was how he set out on a path in which the relationship between people and nature flourished in his abstract and colourful brushstrokes which, over time, became a characteristic of his work.

'I am interested in the fact that any human being can come and connect with what he or she sees. Art should be irrational; painting should be sensual. It does not matter who is painting, if he or she is indigenous, black, white or yellow. The only thing that matters is that spectators should feel something. In fact, I did think about naming this exhibition Sentir (to feel).'

The creative process for De naturaleza interior lasted three weeks, during which time Jacanamijoy dabbled with techniques he had not used before, such as painting with acrylics rather than his usual oils, working on large formats and even treating the canvases. 'I had never done such large formats. It was spectacular! I had to work on the floor, stand on the canvas. I even used brooms to paint this time, but when I saw it on the gallery wall I could see the real work of art.' And this was how that large blue and green canvas with little dashes of colour hanging on the same wall where, decades ago, Luis Caballeros created many of his works of art, seems to have turned into a portal to another world where spectators can cross over to a jungle dimension of their own making.

De-folklorising the indigenous, the Colombian

Undoubtedly, much of the uniqueness of Jacanamijoy is linked to his indigenous identity and, when he is asked if he is tired of his work being classed as exotic because of his identity, he replies that he is.

'I am interested in people seeing us for what we are. There are still journalists who sometimes ask for a photo of me wearing my feathers even though I have been living in Bogota for 30 years! We are the decorative past when they want us to go and sing the national anthem in Quechua at Nariño's house, or when they want the Mamos to back leaders, viewed from a helicopter, with their lime flasks and white coats, but we become an uncomfortable present when we claim our land. We are decorative items! I am proud of my roots, my identity is undeniable, but it is not about capitalising on that and I think that de-folklorising us as indigenous people and as Colombians to the rest of the world is something that my exhibitions in Colombia and around the world do achieve.'