



Decoding the Purity of an Icon

Belinda Flores-Shinshillas

March 22 - May 14, 2018



Cultural promotion strategies have always been part of diplomacy. Culture is one of the main presentation cards for nations in their effort to spread an image that helps them face political challenges or international positioning. Mexico promotes its culture abroad with the objective that the world would know us better and would trust more in our strength as a country. Cultural exchanges allow us to identify and build points in common among different national realities.

Cultural diplomacy plays a vital role in current international relations, especially between Mexico and the United States.

The primary objective of the Mexican Cultural Institutes Abroad is to promote the image of Mexico through the diffusion of the Culture and Art of our country in its broadest sense, and to become a benchmark for Mexico in the cities where it is located. Having the advantage of utilizing their own gallery spaces, the promotion of Mexico is facilitated and intensified through integral and permanent cultural programs in our Cultural Institutes. Likewise, the Institutes have become a determining instrument in the Mexican collaboration by engaging the local artistic and cultural scenes. Fostering relationships with strategic partners and with the community contributes to establishing direct links with important players for Mexico.

We welcome the Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans, which we are certain will become a meeting place and reference for the dissemination of Mexican culture in this city that has so many long-standing ties with our country. From the distant past of 1826 when the Consulate of Mexico opened its doors for the first time in New Orleans it became the first consulate our country opened in the world.

Art builds bridges and goes beyond any borders.

Carlos Enríquez Verdura
Directorate of Educational and Cultural Cooperation
Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico

The year 2018 brings forth new challenges for Mexicans in the Southeast of the United States. On one hand, we continue our adjustment to the new relationship and on the other hand, we continue to build new cooperation pathways with this wonderful country. In general, it has its arms widespread open to diversity and recognizes the effort and difference that Mexicans make in this country. However, it still poses great challenges and offers many opportunities for improvement to a single community.

2018 also arrives with a great recognition for the Consulate of Mexico in New Orleans, whereas the Government of Mexico whom I am honored to represent has recognized the effort and dedication that this consular mission provides in favor of different cultural manifestations and artistic currents. It also has acknowledged the wide array of talent from so many Mexicans and friends of Mexico, who have excelled through the Gallery of the Consulate of Mexico in New Orleans.

Starting this year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico established the Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans, which will be added to the Network of Cultural Institutes of Mexico, primordial spaces for cultural diplomacy that have become meeting and reference sites for the promotion of the Mexican culture at a local level. The Cultural Institutes are also ideal places to strengthen the interaction with the community.

The primary objective of the Mexican Cultural Institutes Abroad is to promote the image of Mexico by supporting cultural expressions in its broadest and fullest sense, including multidisciplinary forms like visual arts, music, performing arts, film, literature and gastronomy. The mission of the Cultural Institutes is to be protagonists of the cultural scene in their different host cities.

In this sense, I decided that the first exhibition of 2018 as the newly established Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans should be that of the extraordinary work of the Mexican woman who promoted from its beginnings what today is transformed into this institution, artist Belinda Flores-Shinshillas, whose work I present today in this first catalog of the Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans.

Belinda is a remarkable artist, with a talent that today, the walls of the Gallery of the Mexican Cultural Institute shows her sensitivity to capture the essence of the characters that posed for this exhibition. Secondly, Belinda is a great and very dear friend, she spared no effort to build what today will undoubtedly be a lifelong friendship. Third, but at the same time being again first, Belinda is a great Mexican with a big heart, generous and with a deep love for Mexico.

Already as an artist Belinda has forged herself with great effort and constant dedication to the different disciplines in which she participates. For this Institute it has been without any doubt the engine that has opened the doors to many artists, in the eyes of thousands of spectators and visitors, in the many occasions where the walls of the Gallery of the Consulate of Mexico in New Orleans have been honored to showcase their talents.

In this way, I welcome you to enjoy this catalog and I cordially invite you to visit us and enjoy this wonderful exhibition, which today opens its doors as a renovated space, the "Mexican Cultural Institute in New Orleans".

Decoding the Purity of an Icon



Icons were traditionally images of religious figures made in most cases in the form of portraits of Virgins specifically for the use of veneration. It is unsettling now to think about how the religious culture constructed icons of strong women that were represented as an inspiration but undermined with profound feminine prejudice at the same time.

We are used to seeing the Virgin image as an Icon of feminine strength, but we forget that the medieval narrative valued her fear of the fate imposed upon her as a young woman. These images are part of a cultural conversation about womanhood, which should be ongoing. By recognizing the complexities of historical images and their connotation, we could add our own voices to our contemporary cultural conversation.

The Webster's dictionary defines purity as "being free from or unmixed with any other matter". *Decoding the Purity of an Icon* is a series of 10 oil female portrait paintings on canvas and 2 installations thought to convey the message of recording an individual's appearance and personality, using the tradition of Iconography for veneration of purity and spirituality beyond the representation of the feminine subject. Furthermore, these works have been approached in a contemporary manner, making these portraits much more than pure representation.

Portraiture is a very old art form going back at least about 5,000 years, used to document the existence of someone. However, now I believe that it represents more than just a record. It should always be used to show the power, importance, virtue, strength, beauty, and contemporaneity of the individual portrayed, in this case women, as Icons of the purity of their own existence.

My goal with this series of paintings is to find a way of make the most intimate feelings of a woman's soul emerge and transfer them to the viewer while venerating the embedded beauty in their nature.

Belinda Flores-Shinshillas



Cover Page: TORI
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches

LUCIA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





MARICARMEN
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





BETHZABE
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





XOCHITL
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





CRISTINA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





TANYA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





EKATERINA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





THERESA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches





PATRICIA
oil/acrylic on canvas 36 x 48 inches



Vessels: Divine Holders of Purity

Installation

Through the millennium of history, the Vessel has been present in religious rituals. It stands for the body of the deity invoked for worship. The small space of the vessel becomes the universe in the center of which the supreme forces exist.

In Sumero-Semitic tradition it symbolizes the fertilizing power of the waters of the Great Mother, containing the cosmic waters as the feminine receptive principle, the life source. It stands for acceptance, fertility, and purity.

In the Kabbalah, vessel means treasure. The Shekinah (the glory of the divine presence, in Kabbalism is a divine feminine aspect) is compared to a beautiful vase. In ancient Egypt the vessel stands for eternal life. A flowing vessel represents the beneficent female deity.

In Celtic tradition it holds the healing waters; it is an attribute of mother goddesses one of whom is Cerridwen (regarded as a woman of incredible power and magic). The alchemical or hermetic vessel always means the place where miracles occur. It is the mother's womb in which new birth takes shape, hence the belief that the vessel holds the secret of transmutation.

As the maternal symbol the vessel implies nourishment, flowing waters and purity. In general, the function of the vessel is related to holding, immersion or pouring-flowing, all characteristic qualities of the Mother Goddesses.

In Buddhist tradition, one of the eight auspicious symbols is the 'vessel of inexhaustible treasure' symbolizing spiritual abundance. This vessel always remains full in spite of how much is taken from it, remaining pure of anything external.

Vessels: Divine Holders of Purity is an installation of 7 oil paintings on aluminum panels presented with 5 wooden vessels that are part of the project *Decoding the Purity of an Icon*.



VESSELS: DIVINE HOLDERS OF PURITY
Installation of 7 aluminum panels 12x12 inches

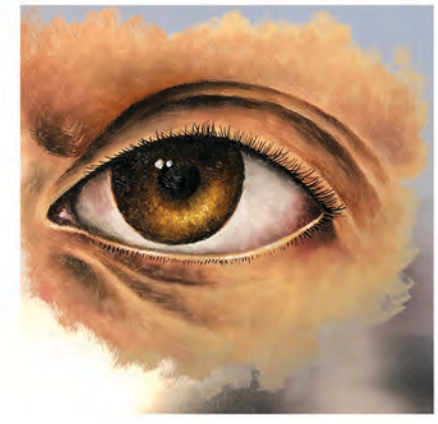
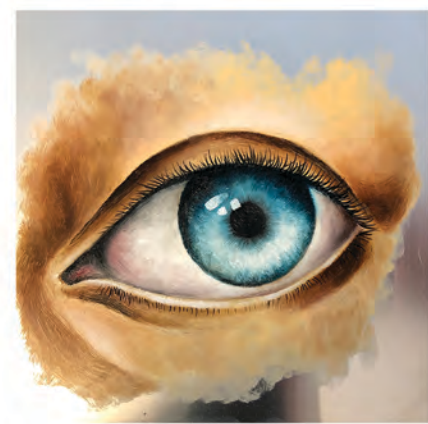
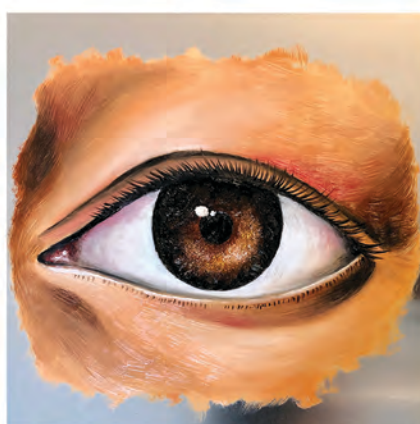
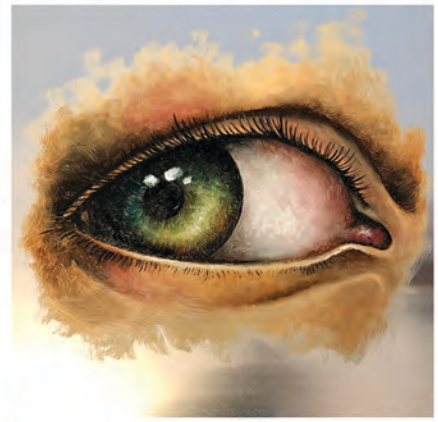
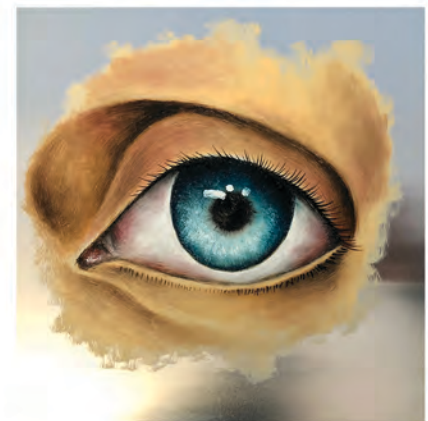
Decipher Installation

Decipher means translate from code, or more generally, to figure it out. Sometimes images include signs or icons that we cannot identify or that seem out of place. To be able to discover someone's essence look at their eyes, and you will find it.

Decipher is an installation of 12 oil paintings on aluminum panels that are part of the project *Decoding the Purity of an Icon*. This installation seeks to uncover the purity of a woman's soul through the light and expressivity of their eyes.

An individual's thoughts and feelings can be discovered by looking into his or her eyes. The great Roman philosopher *Cicero* said, "The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter." In Matthew the bible uncovers that, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

I do believe that our hearts convey the most emotional picture through our eyes. It is not simply a window but a reflection of our state of mind.



DECIPHER
Installation of 12 aluminum panels 8x8 inches



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