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EL CANAL DE PANAMA - THE PANAMA CANAL

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THE PASSION OF PAINTING

The Panamanian painter Coqui Calderon's style identifies itself with colorful successive-strokes and has been projected internationally with exhibitions abroad and in Panamá. Her portraits are found in museums and private collections...

Nobody has any doubt about the contribution that women have made to Latin American painting. From the expressive force of Frida Kahlo to the audacity performance of Marta Minujin; from the magic world of Remedios Varo to the tortured expression of Ana Mendieta, women have plastically expressed themselves imposing their vision and accompanying the artistic movements of the continent. The Panamanian painter Coqui Calderon, has known how to express the landscape and history of her native Panamá in her paintings. She was precursory of several aspects and promoted the develop-

ment of art in her country. When she was young she delved into psychology and history, until she started working at the Rosemont College workshops. Later she studied in Paris, at the Grand Chaumiere and at the Julien academy. When she returned to Panamá, the painter recalls: *"the city artistically was a desert; only a few painters worked alone with indifference. There was a group that would meet and I frequented them; the Master Guillermo Trujillo, Alfredo Sinclair, Alberto Dutary. I don't forget their advice and suggestions. Dutary invited me to work at his study because I didn't have an atelier and soon he*

organized my first exhibition."

The painter recognizes that this exhibition was the initiation of her professional career and said: *"from then on I didn't stop painting and participating in exhibitions."*

The career of this artist has been consolidated throughout several exhibitions in Panamá and in foreign countries. She obtained awards and honors such as the "Orden de Vasco Nuñez de Balboa," granted by the government of her country in 1983, in recognition of her work.

From 1962 through 1968 she lived in New York, and recalled: *"I met great artists there, Liechtenstein, who was very kind, Claus Oldenburg, Warhol.*

It was a great time in New York, of much cultural activity and of

BY ADRIANA BIANCO



estilo de Coqui Calderón, un lenguaje donde el color es protagonista y el tema es la captación del sentimiento y la emoción.

En 1968 recibe el Primer Premio del XII Certamen Nacional de Cultura de El Salvador, que le da un impulso consagratorio.

Durante los '70, Panamá despierta a la cultura, se crea el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Panamá y Coqui colabora en su desarrollo y en la formación de talleres de Gráfica, promoviendo la institución y al arte.

Cuando en los '80 se traslada a vivir a Miami, la artista había ya recorrido diversas temáticas y estilos. Había transitado por la abstracción y el pop-art, había adquirido experiencia y enriquecido su paleta. Se había dedicado a indagar el paisaje y la figura, sin embargo

the vanguard movements; of op and pop-art, abstract expressionism, and hard-edge. The influence of all these is reflected in my work during this epoch."

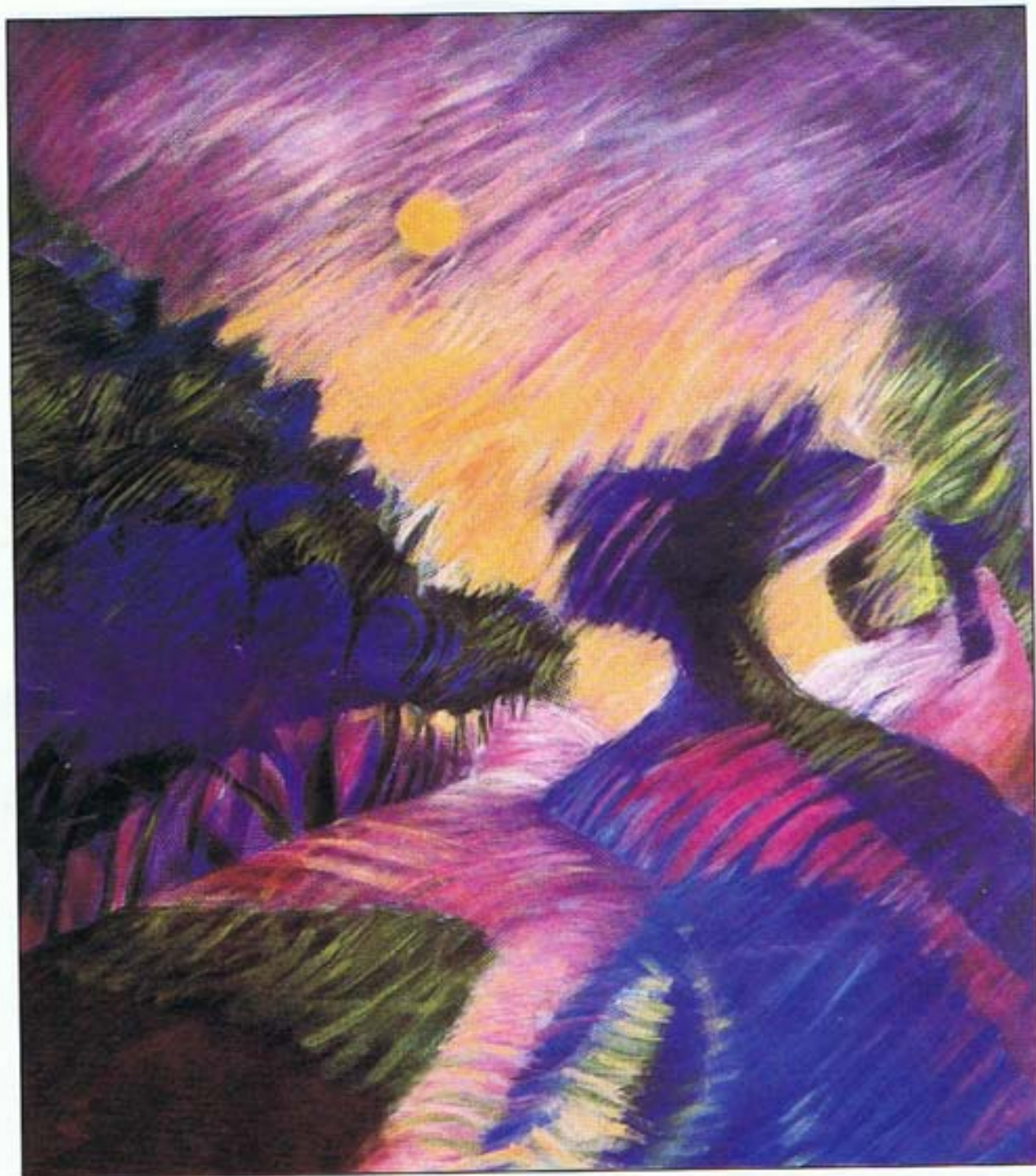
But the influences gave way to Coqui Calderon's style, a language where color is protagonic and the theme is to capture feelings and emotion.

In 1968 she received the First Award of the XII National Cultural Contest of El Salvador, which gave her a consecrated impulse.

During the 70's, Panamá experiences a cultural awakening and the Contemporary Art Museum of Panamá is created where Coqui collaborated in its development and in the formation of the Graphics workshop, promoting the institution and art.

When in the 80's she moved to live in Miami, the artist had already covered many themes and styles. She had delved into abstraction and pop-art, had gained experience and enriched her palette. She had dedicated herself to painting landscapes and figures, however, there were other opportunities to venture into. In Miami a series of surges related to Panamanian landscapes, the green hills, tree covered slopes, the Coclé highlands, with vivacity and emotion and with the color of the tropics. Nature invades her paintings with the great forces that life provides, and it becomes the main thematic supported by a pantheist idea: we are part of nature and nature is all. A return to our origins, to the union of nature and humanity, as the

El camino con el cielo rojo, acrílico. The way with red sky, acrylic.



La Madre Tierra iluminada por la luna, acrílico, 1994.
Moonlighted Mother Earth, acrylic, 1994.

quedaban caminos por donde aventurarse. En Miami surge toda una serie vinculada al paisaje panameño, las colinas verdes, los árboles que cubren las laderas, las serranías de Coclé, con la vivacidad de la emoción y con el color del trópico. La naturaleza invade el cuadro como la gran fuerza ge-

neradora de vida, y se convierte en temática principal sostenida por una idea panteísta: somos parte de la naturaleza y ella es el todo. Una vuelta a los orígenes, a la unión de la naturaleza y lo humano, como tierra recordando los ritos de la fecundidad. Esta etapa parece interrumpirse por los

earth reminds us of fertility rituals. This stage seems to interrupt itself due to political events that affect her country: the death and the end of the Torrijos and Noriega dictatorships. The artist feels deeply affected by the situation that shakes Panamá. "I traveled to my country frequently -



Esperando,
acrílico
sobre
lienzo.
Waiting,
acrylic
on canvas.

acontecimientos políticos que vive su país: la muerte y el fin de la dictadura de Torrijos y la dictadura de Noriega. La artista se siente profundamente conmovida por la situación que sacude a Panamá. "Yo viajaba frecuentemente a mi país - explica la pintora- y la crisis política era cada vez más tensa... la gente tenía miedo y mucha ansiedad. Salíamos a las calles con pañuelos blancos como símbolo de paz, de justicia, de libertad." Así surgió la Serie Panamá, como un

desborde testimonial y directo de un momento histórico, que la pintora capta a través de grupos humanos, ráfagas de manos y pañuelos, militares en acción. Son pinturas casi gestuales, en tonos grises y negros que transmiten la opresión y el miedo. Con la normalidad institucional, Coqui Calderón vuelve a sus bodegones, a la intimidad colorida de sus naturalezas muertas, como una catarsis de las fuertes imágenes vividas. Pronto recupera el paisaje, pero ese paisaje

explained the painter - and the political crisis was more tense each time... people were afraid and suffered from anxiety. We took to the streets with white handkerchiefs as a symbol of peace, justice and liberty." That's the way that the Panamá Series came about, as a testimonial and a direct overflow from a historic moment that the painter portrays with human groups, those that waive hands and handkerchiefs and the military in action. They are paintings

externo, panameño, se funde con un paisaje interno, femenino. Empieza una etapa más reflexiva, donde la figura es mujer. Mujer-árbol, mujer-pájaro, mujer-naturaleza, surge la "Serie de Diosas y Angeles."

Sus paisajes se pueblan de tierra, cielo y mar, se pueblan de lunas y soles, se vuelven paisajes cósmicos, espaciales.

La figura muestra su centro corporal: el vientre, y su centro emocional: el corazón. El vientre se vuelve corazón y el corazón se transforma en esencia de lo femenino, la maternidad.

Sus cuadros son viajes de color y sentimiento, y la artista nos invita a esa travesía visual y espiritual.

Coqui Calderón ama el color y nos dice: "el color es lo que me va llevando mientras pinto, es el color el que me impulsa para expresar el sentimiento

of gestures, in gray and black tones that convey oppression and fear.

When institutional normality was established, Coqui Calderon went back to her "bodegones", to the colorful intimacy of nature, as a catharsis from those strong vivid images she experienced. She soon undertakes landscapes, but those outdoor Panamanian images blend with her feminine self. A more reflexive stage is born where the subject is a woman. The woman tree, the woman bird, the woman and nature, so the "Series Gods and Angels" is born.

Her landscapes portray land, sky, sea, moons and suns, they are transformed into spatial and cosmic landscapes.

The human figure shows its body center: the middle section and its

emotional center: the heart. The middle section becomes the heart and the heart becomes the essence of femininity, which is maternity.

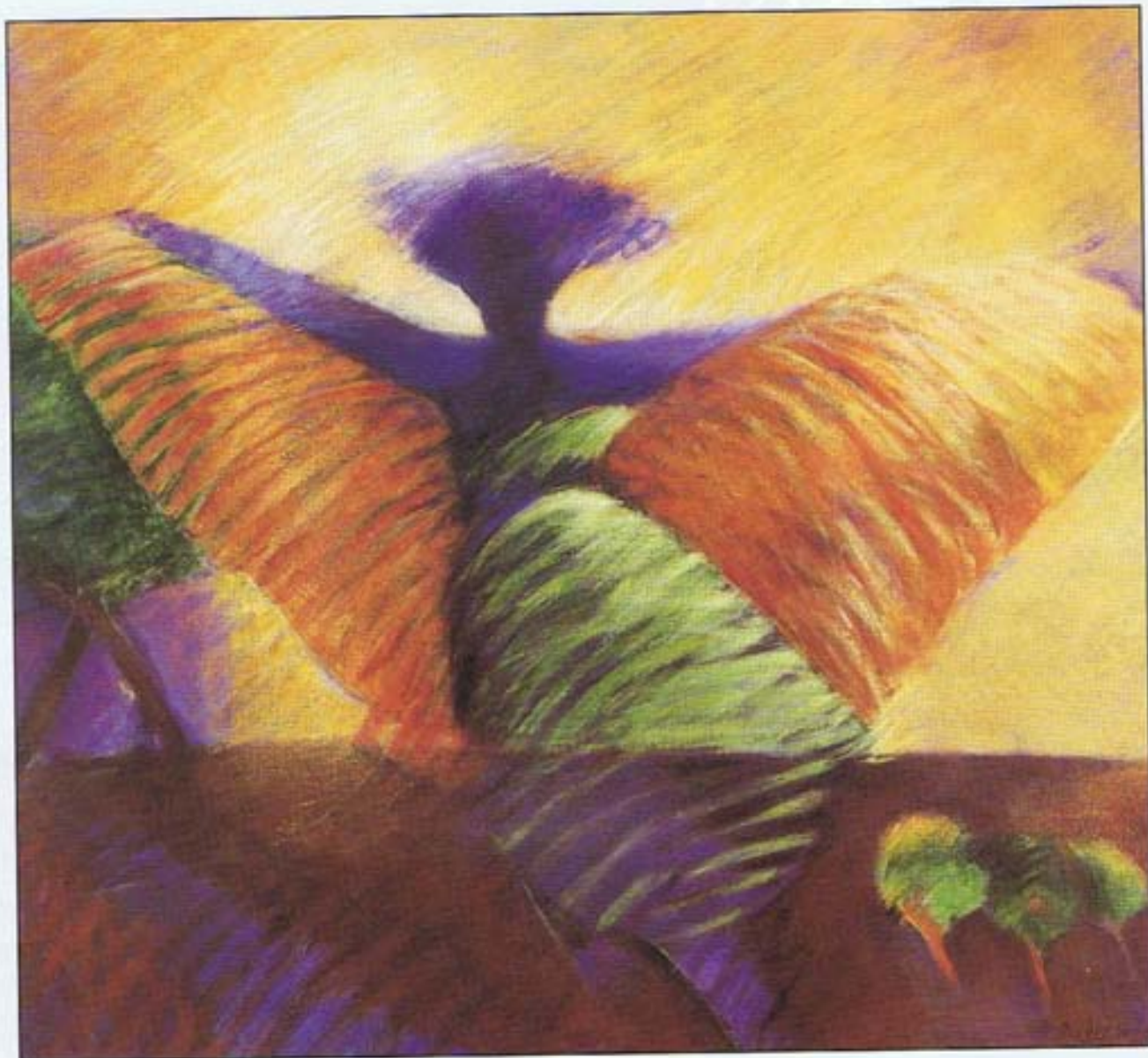
Her portraits are voyages of color and feelings, and the artist invites us on this visual and spiritual trip. Coqui Calderon loves color and tells us: "color is what moves me while I paint, it is color that makes me express the feeling I want to portray. The search for color brings out the passion in me".

This is how the vibrant greens, daring yellows, pure blues and uneasy purples come to life. They are the colors of the tropics and of the light in her country. Those colors and light are portrayed in a very special technique: the pastel.

Coqui did oils and acrylics; when she found pastels she felt that this



Agresión
bajo el
rojo,
acrílico,
1988.
Aggression
under red,
acrylic,
1988.



Angel terrestre,
acrílico, 1995.
Terrestrial angel,
acrylic, 1995.

Camino arriba
con tres morados,
acrílico.
Up the road with
three purples,
acrylic.

que deseo expresar. La búsqueda del color me apasiona”.

Así surgen los verdes vibrantes, los amarillos atrevidos, los azules puros y los morados inquietantes. Son los colores del trópico y de la luz de su tierra. Ese color y esa luz nos llegan a través de una técnica muy especial: el pastel.

Coqui frecuentó el óleo y el acrílico; cuando encontró el pastel sintió que esa era la técnica que mejor la expresaba. “Comencé a pintar en pastel en la década de los '80, desde entonces no lo abandoné porque el pastel

was the technique that best suited her.

“When I started painting pastels during the 80s, from then on I didn't abandon them because pastels are direct and I like to work feeling the pure pigments.”

Her style identifies itself with those colorful successive strokes. Her work



Envase de vidrio, pastel, 1991.
Glass bowl, pastel, 1991.



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es directo y me gusta trabajar sintiendo los pigmentos puros."

Su estilo se identifica en esos trazos-ráfagas, coloridos. Su obra se ha proyectado internacionalmente con exposiciones en el extranjero y en Panamá. Sus cuadros figuran en museos y colecciones privadas.

Al preguntarle cómo definiría la pintura, la pintora no dudó en su respuesta: *"Para mí la pintura es la aventura de captar y ordenar sentimientos, ideas, sensaciones para expresarlos en la tela. Eso requiere disciplina y paciencia, así como también una buena dosis de humildad."*

Pintar para Coqui es una aventura visual y emocional.

Una aventura a la que nos invita en cada una de sus obras, penetrando en sus paisajes, contemplando sus bodegones o participando en sus imágenes políticas. Una aventura a la que nos invita para indagar sobre la naturaleza y nuestra condición humana. O simplemente, una aventura a través de la luz y el color, la imaginación y la poesía de su mundo pictórico. ■

has been projected internationally with exhibitions abroad and in Panamá. Her portraits are found in museums and private collections.

When asked to define the art of painting, the artist was straight forward: *"To me painting is the adventure of capturing and sorting out feelings, ideas, sensations, to express them on canvas. This requires discipline and patience, as well as a good dose of humility."*

Painting for Coqui is a visual and emotional adventure.

An adventure to which we are invited in each of her works, viewing her landscapes, observing her vase paintings or participating in her political images. An adventure where we are invited to delve into nature and our own condition as humans. Or simply, an adventure through light and color, imagination and the poetry of her pictorial world. ■