



THE SPIRAL WORD : EL CODEX ESTÁNFOR

JUANA ALICIA

# NARRATIVE

*FOR EL CENTRO CHICANO MURALS AT STANFORD  
JUANA ALICIA*



My concept for the suite of murals for El Centro Chicano de Stanford was inspired by the history and literature of multiethnic Latinoamerica, from the ancient stories of the Popol Vuh to modern Xican@ poetry. My inspirations came from diverse sources, from Miguel Cervantes, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, José Martí, Violeta Parra, Jorge Luis Borges, Rosario Castellanos, Sandra Cisneros, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Felipe Herrera, Junot Díaz, Julia Alvarez, and more than any other author, Eduardo Galeano. His books, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, and the trilogy *Memories of Fire*, function for me like a subtext for the whole set of paintings, most especially the codex. Originally, I thought I would include the actual texts and quotes in calligraphy, but ultimately opted for pure visual narrative and symbol.

Each of the four surfaces has its own role to play in the story and in the space: this is one of the smallest, most compact and narrative-dense works I have created. The challenge was to create a series of works that altered an institutional-feeling entryway into a sanctuary for some of our collective narratives as multi-faceted Latin@s and original peoples of these continents. I wanted to create a space for students to find beauty and honor for their identities as Latin Americans at Stanford, to create a place that both narrated our legacies and celebrated our cultural projects. Having taught at Stanford on several occasions through the last several decades, I am familiar with both the opportunities and challenges Latin@ students face within this particular environment. I wanted the murals to create feelings of safety and pride and stimulate historical consciousness with regard to our evolution as a people. As the students and alumnae requested in my initial meetings with the Centro and Concilio, I sought to represent past, present and future realities for Latin@/indigenous students at Stanford. What follows are brief descriptions for each of the four narrative surfaces of the murals.

***“ I wanted to create a space for students to find beauty and honor for their identities as Latin Americans at Stanford, to create a place that both narrated our legacies and celebrated our cultural projects.”***



# *El Codex Estánfor*

2012

Watercolor and digital print

18.5" x 125"



The swirling thread of the speech glyph carries the voice of the poets, scribes, singers and storytellers, connecting generations with a continuous sinew of narrative. The panels are presented on a gently folding surface, meant to echo the folding form of the original Mesoamerican books.



# Genesis

2012

Watercolor and digital print

18.5" x 30.55"

The tale of the finished codex above the scribe on the frieze begins with the sacred creation story of the Maya, where the jaguar breathes song into a conch, which sings the creation story of the Popol Vuh: the Princess Ixquic is a blooming tree, bearing the strange fruit of Hun Hunapu's head. With his last breath, he spits into her hand, impregnating her with the warrior twins Hunapu and Xbalanque. They appear later in the story, in the form of the underworld ball game with the gods of Xibalbá (the underworld) as illustrated in the battle scene from the ancient frescos from Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico.





# ***Conquest and Slavery***

2012

Watercolor and digital print

18.5" x 22.4"

In this next panel, the scribe's story continues, with the burning of her libraries, the entrapment of her indigenous and African brothers and sisters, the slave ships landing in the Americas, forced labor in cane and henequen fields, and in the silver and copper mines. The hand of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz inscribes her observations of injustice, penning the revelations of the first feminist writer of the colonial Americas.



# ***Resistance and Revolution***

2012

Watercolor and digital print

18.5" x 30.55"

The large figure of late, great singer Mercedes Sosa, “the voice of Latin America” carries images of struggle and triumph against imperialism on her sarape, bearing the portraits of writers and activists. From left to right:

1. Cuban poet José Martí
2. Mexican Zapatistas
3. Guatemalan women
4. Chilean composer, songwriter, folklorist, ethnomusicologist and visual artist Violeta Parra
5. (on her collar) Black freedom fighter Asata Shakur; Nobel Laureate poet Gabriela Mistral and the Mirabal sisters (the Butterflies of the Dominican Republic whose activism brought on the downfall of dictator Rafael Trujillo)
6. Mujeres De Negro/Women in Black, mothers of disappeared women of Juarez, Mexico
7. African American Athletes John Carlos and Tommie Smith raise their fists in the The Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.
8. Commandante Ramona of the Zapatistas addresses the public.



# **Gemelos**

**2012**

**Watercolor and digital print**

**18.5" x 31.76"**

The warrior twins of the Popol Vuh, Hunapu and Xbalanque, appear as depicted in the frescoes of Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico and as modern opposites: the gangster and the dreamer. Behind them, the Ollin butterfly, the Aztec symbol for movement and balance, holds out against the forces of war, nuclear destruction, the fireball of Fukushima and the melting icebergs of our current historical moment.



# ***El Futuro***

**2012**

**Watercolor and digital print**

**18.5" x 29.9"**

The year 2012, or 5,334 in the Mayan long count, signals the end of the current cycle and the beginning of a new one, starting over from zero to count into the future. The future holds a vision of reforestation and ecological renewal, with mycelium fungi reclaiming toxic waste sites. The scribe writes back to history, connecting her thoughts and voice with those of her ancestors.





# ***Nopal de Resistencia y Raices***

2012

Digital print and acrylic on canvas

9' x 15'

During the process of creating the murals, the cactus bloomed into an organism with its own voice, shaking off any further elaborations. It represents beautiful, burgeoning growth in the harshest of environments, the gift of remaining fruitful and full of water in the middle of a desert, the joyful energy of resistance and the blossoming of ideas and culture. The roots that extend onto the frieze below the ceiling curl into speech glyph forms, pulling inspiration from the earth itself.



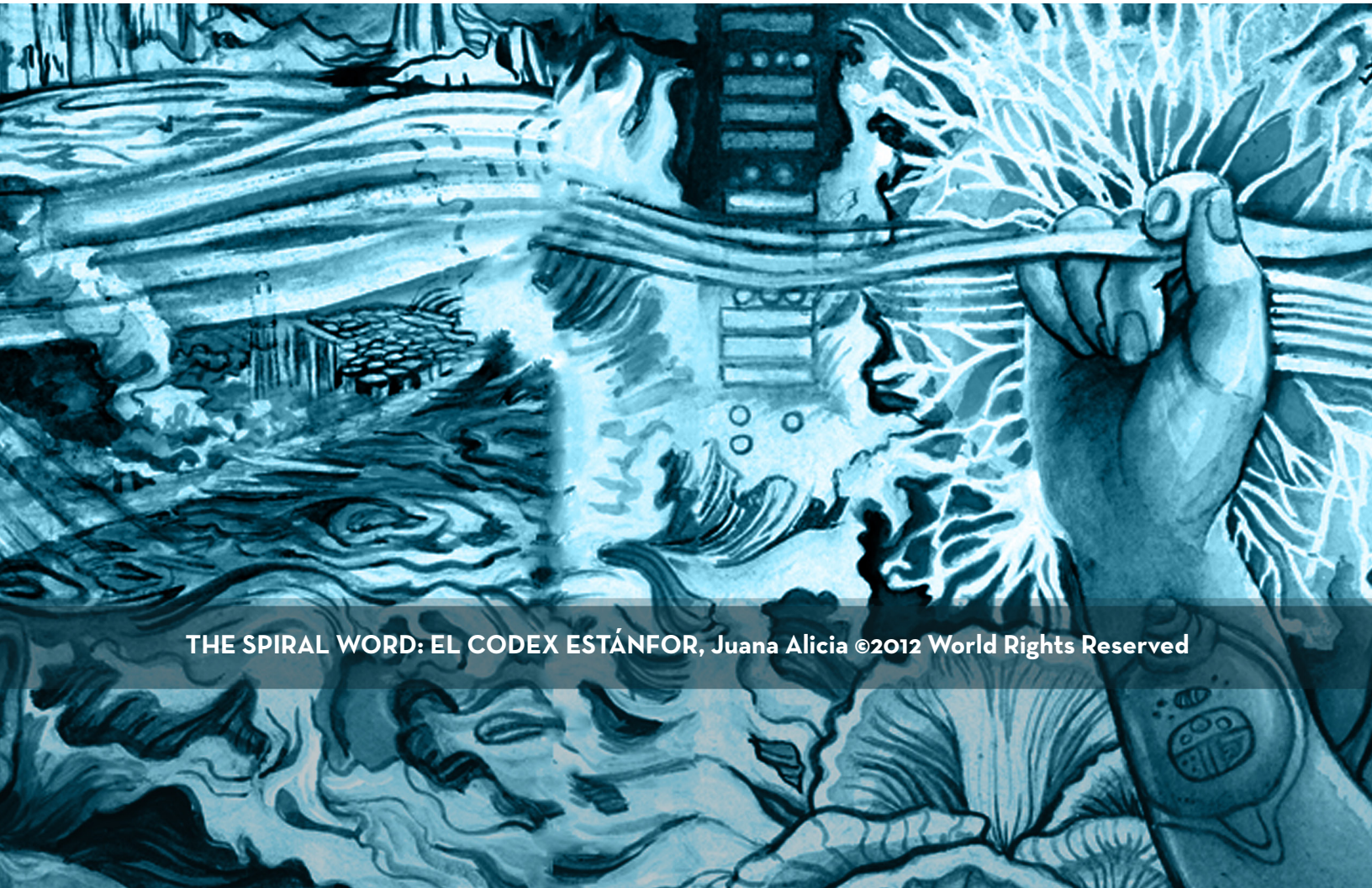
# *MAYAN SCRIBE*

2012

Watercolor and digital print

45"x 65"

The scribe has ideas of her own to pen onto the unfolding codex: creation myths and stories of conquest and survival, from the various centuries that she has survived, a witness to our story. She sits with a conch shell full of pigment in one hand, writing stylus in the other, on the trunk of a ceiba tree, its thorns protecting her. Among the ruins of Mesoamerican culture, stone sculptures and ancient masks whisper stories into her ears. The ruins of the barrios of our continents, from Sao Paolo to the Bronx, sit behind her as well, echoing the immigration stories of sacrifice, survival and triumph.



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