



**Window
Space**

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Izzy Paez

Dónde Brilla el Sol

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¿Dónde Brilla el Sol?

Where are you now?

Is the sun visible from where your body is located?

Can you sense its warmth or its absence?

Have you ever tried to catch a sunbeam between your fingers?



Izzy Paez's *Donde Brilla el Sol*, 2020, is a 66"x 60" acrylic on canvas painting situated in Xpace Cultural Centre's Window Space, that showcases a rich, cosmological universe where a conglomerate of six colorful suns fills most of the surface, each sun revealing singular face-like features. Over the blackish background, the suns seem to float among a purplish stardust fog, around them jaguar faces that resemble masks join in unison, as if staring at them. The painting is framed by a rain of yellow paper cempasúchitl flowers on both of its sides.¹ Through this window installation, Paez presents to the viewer a sneak peek of a dynamic and lively

¹ Cempasúchitl flowers or marigolds have a powerful meaning in Mexican celebrations and traditional rituals. Mostly known for their presence during Día de Muertos celebrations, where these flowers, in their yellow and orange variations, are used to make a path that leads the death to their respective altars and ofrendas. Cempasúchitl resembles the shape and the brightness of the sun, for this reason they are used for this kind of paths. To light up the way of those beloved ones long-gone to other realms.

universe. Inspired by Mexican traditional artwork, Paez's work reflects the aesthetics of the diverse art objects that decorate the restaurant their family has run since the early 90's on the Danforth, El Sol.

Like in *Donde Brilla el Sol*'s universe, the interior walls of El Sol's are filled with masks and suns, part of a ceramic collection – from the Guerrero region – full of bright colours that harmonizes with an atmosphere filled with the smells of simmering sauces, flavors of corn tortilla, beans, and machaca, and the sounds of moving pans and ebullient conversation, characteristic of a restaurant like el Sol. A vibrant environment that became essential to Paez's childhood and that brought them closer to their Yaqui-Mexican roots. As a self-taught artist, Paez started bringing the imagery of Mexican handmade artwork to the canvas since they were 10 years old. In *Donde Brilla el Sol*, Paez projects the essence that El Sol holds as an emotional and physical place, by painting what they have absorbed from its imagery. Such absorption is carried in different levels since it is not only sensorial but spiritual. Paez's own personal process lets themselves be inhabited by the richness and abundance of their cultural Yaqui-roots. A connexion kept alive by intergenerational family relations after their family arrival to Canada about three decades ago. As a member of a diasporic community, Paez thrives in their own journey to remain connected to their roots.

El Rostro del Sol

Most of the time we take the sun's presence for granted, forgetting that it is an essential source of life. *Donde Brilla el Sol* compells us to stop and face the sun; actually, it makes us look at the many faces of the bright astro. From the canvas, not one but six incandescent suns manifest to the passer by, each performing a distinctive gesture, like a smile, una sacada de lengua,² or a serious look. Every sun seems to embody a character with a well-defined personality. In this sense, Paez shows us the sun as a multiplicity that interpellates our own. Their depiction of the sun is not just a reference to the incandescent star, but to the inner lively energy all

² 'Una sacada de lengua' is the gesture to sticking out your tongue, which can connote playfulness, defiance, or irreverence.

alive beings carry inside, an internal source of life, a spiritual dimension that is diverse in itself.

The sun has many meanings in diverse cultures. For the Yaqui, the Indigenous peoples of the Yaqui River valley in the Sonora sierra, the sun, the moon, and the stars are deities; and at the same time, they are their siblings, because there is a kinship between them through the connection of their world.³ Paez's suns are also about kinship, that of family, community, and ancestry. As part of a diasporic Yaqui community, Paez and their family members are each like one of *Donde Brilla el Sol* distinctive suns, different faces that belong to a whole. El Sol as a site and as a symbol, is the manifestation of their Yaqui and Mexican identity and legacy.

El Jaguar Tras la Mascara

The presence of the jaguar is not arbitrary in the painting; the jaguar is an important presence in the cosmology of many Mexican cultures. For the Aztecs – Yaqui are Uto-Aztecan speakers – the jaguar was perceived as a powerful entity and was related to the night, since it is in its darkness that it moves around. It also brings the end of day or cycles, as revealed in some Codices.⁴ In *Donde Brilla el Sol*, jaguars and suns juxtaposed, represent a day-night duality, but rather than a binary is a complementary nature, a balance.

Paez's jaguars are masks, but instead of a disguise for a potential wearer, they are a medium to become the jaguar, not to act as one. Becomings are recurrent in Paez's work: in their painting *Jaguars in the Dessert*, 2020, a human-jaguar hybrid appears running on a path. The human's ears are that of the animal and their flowy dress is filled with the animal's print. The dream-like imagery recalls that of Remedios Varo or Frida Kahlo, since some of their most striking paintings depict the

³ Yaqui aniam (worlds or realms) are organized within their cosmological worldview, not as segregating categories but as interconnected realities that have diverse relationships of time and space. Among the Yaqui aniam is the teeka ania which encompasses all that is in the sky and in the universe, there is also the sea ania, flower world very present in their traditional deer dance among many others.

⁴ Guilhem Olivier, "El Jaguar en la Cosmología Mexicana," *Arqueología mexicana*. no.72(2005): 52-57.

merging of human with animals, plants and even places. The intertwining of worlds. But far from being a surrealist depiction, Paez's becomings are about growth and a spiritual dimension that interconnects us with the beings and the realms around us. The yellowish tone of the jaguar masks is enhanced by the matching cempasúchitl flowers, their colour enlivens the painting due to its complementary relation to the purplish background. In medium and content, the viewer can unveil dualities that mix and intertwine with one another. *Donde Brilla el Sol* is all about the realms we inhabit and that inhabit us.

During the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought uncertainty in many aspects of our lives, and for Paez and their family, the possibility to continue with the family business has been a latent concern due to the impact the everchanging local closure policies have had on small businesses. The artist holds on to el sol while wondering, if it is possible for the sun to fade away? In uncertain times, we might as well go back to ancestral knowledge and take some time to look at our outer and inner suns.



Look at or imagine the sunset

hold the sun with your fingers

as if it was a small delicious candy

swallow it

let it shine inside you

ahí es donde brilla el sol

now draw, mold, sing or scream

that sunshine back to the world

- Karina Roman