

“Primero Sueño” “First Dream”

“Piramidal, funesta, de la tierra nacida sombra, al cielo encaminaba...”

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz's poem “First Dream” is sublime. It is the pilgrimage of her soul which, while her body slept, rises from the darkness of the earth in an attempt to reach the upper limits of intellectual knowledge.

Her pilgrimage is a vision in space where color exists without light. In the distance she sees the pinnacle of knowledge: the Egyptian pyramids. She starts to climb them, step by step, but fails to reach their summit. The sun begins to rise, and she awakens back on earth.

“First Dream” is a woman's aspiration to break out of the shackles bound on her by society. Sor Juana's message is as valid today as it was when first written in the 17th century.

My project is to disseminate the message by visually interpreting the spiritual and abstract values of “First Dream”. Of the poem's seven parts, the first two lead out of the silence and darkness of the earth to the brightness of the vision's next three parts. The poem regresses to the banality of the earth in the last two parts. The paintings will be placed in a round chapel.

Born to an unwed mother in Mexico at a time when illegitimacy closed the doors to every opportunity, Sor Juana entered the convent at the age of twenty. She wrote poems, plays both sacred and laic, essays in theology and an autobiographical defense of the right of women to study and cultivate their minds. She went on to become one of the leading poets in New Spain preceding by three centuries the major women poets of our time: Emily Dickinson, Gabriela Mistral, Marianne Moore.

In an age known for its intellectual oppression, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz defied existing conventions and traditions which still face us today three centuries later. She dedicated her life to the pursuit of knowledge, fighting for freedom, equality and acceptance at a time when women of intellect were rebuked and reprimanded for having the courage to think.

The complexity of translating the intellectual and spiritual qualities of “First Dream” onto canvas, the size of the canvases and the installation of the entire exhibit, present a compelling and a strong challenge to me as an artist. The work is important to me not simply because Sor Juana and I are both from Mexico, but because our dreams reside beyond the boundaries of that country. They are shared around the world.

Her “dream” was a cry for deliverance from bondage. In her time the cry was silenced, but its echo can still be heard today stronger than ever!