



MISSOURI
BOTANICAL
GARDEN

The
**SACRED
CROP**

Waleska Font

Kernels of Culture: Maize Around the World

May 3, 2024 - March 31, 2025

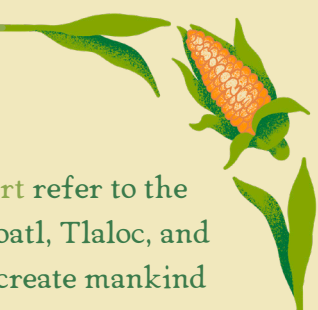
Stephen and Peter Sachs Museum



INTRODUC⁺TION⁺

The Sacred Crop is a vibrant exploration of the profound cultural and spiritual significance of corn in Pre-Columbian Latin America that embarks the audience on a journey to the Inca culture, with *Inti Raymi*. This piece captures the essence of the festival dedicated to the sun god, Inti, who was revered for his life-giving power, essential for the growth of corn.

Thanks to the wealth of documentation available on Aztec culture, the artist was able to craft three pieces based on its mythology. *Cintéotl* depicts the Aztec deity of maize and symbol of gender fluidity and duality.



The Men of Corn and Sprouting Heart refer to the Aztec creation myth, where Quetzalcoatl, Tlaloc, and Cintéotl unsuccessfully attempted to create mankind using ash, mud, and wood, turning to corn for their fourth try, breathing life into the humans that inhabit the earth today. Sisterhood features the holy trinity of Huixtocihuatl, Chalchiuhtlicue, and Chicomecóatl, in a tribute to the elements that converge in the creation of a tortilla.

The exhibit extends its narrative in Nakawe, the Huichol great-grandmother creator who is responsible for the growth of vegetation, especially corn, the main crop and symbol of fertility that sustains the Wixáritari people. Finally, Waleska closes this series with a love letter to her Venezuelan roots in Ossema, a tribute to the Yukpa god of corn.

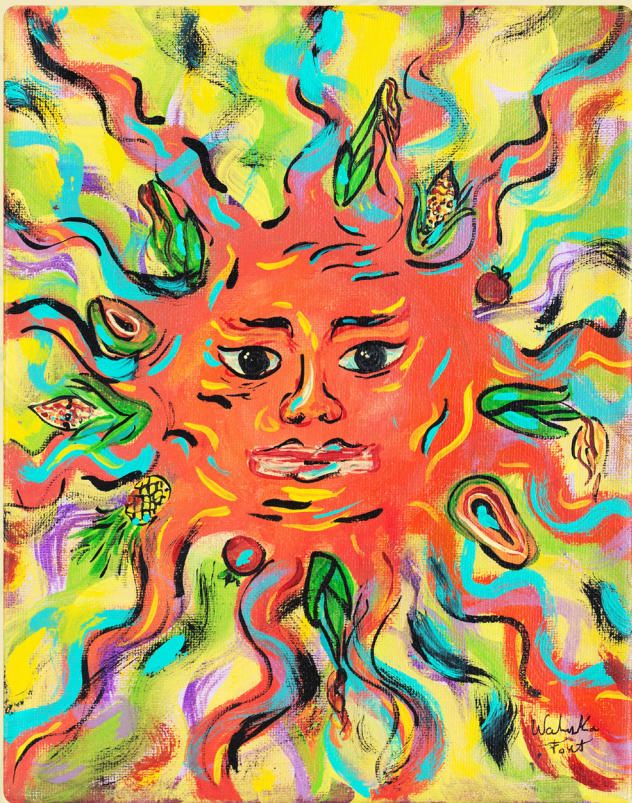
Through poetry and visuals, The Sacred Crop invites viewers to contemplate the spiritual representation of corn and the complex relationship between humans and the divine, through an explosion of color, mysticism and culture.

I INTI RAYMI

Traveling through time
towards the manifestation of what will be,
pulsing across the fiber of space,
bowing to the sun.

Roots grow from the petals and fruits
in the foothills of Cusco
piercing the concrete of the esplanade
in a kaleidoscope of feathers and flutes
of shells resonating
and rain that cushions the ears
of those who come to listen.

Corn begins with the rays
that sculpt its shape
and create mandalas with the fallen leaves,
flowers and fruit.
Our sacred crop is ready to harvest,
A new era for Inti rises.



II CINTÉOTL

Humanity is enslaved to its memory.

addicted to not looking back.

Stuffed with glazing futures where gender is a bad word
buried by sheep scholars and codex erasers,
labeled slur, unnecessary and tempting.

It's not just you, but it's ok to cry,

you are all of them simultaneously,

and not what translations impaled in your heart.

How strong did their words drill our roots

that we can't conceive life as we did before,

before they shamed us for honoring the surrounding grace,

for crying when the sky does,

for not gendering our deities,

for not stamping genitals on what is beyond the comprehension
of crosses and the body of god.

I send a prayer to your altar,
a poem for the exiled ones,
and a painting, dedicated to the grains
you were so kind to share,
overlooking what we had to say
to live another day.



III

SISTERHOOD

In the name of the womb, the lagoons
and the hands that crafted the first meal from corn
in the name of the mothers,
their fountains, and their hands.

In the name of Huixtocihuatl,
mother who art among mothers.
Blessed be she who heals with salt the wounds
inflicted by the waves of the Río Grande,
the inherited cross
gestating since the encounter of the worlds.

In the name of Chalchiuhtlicue,
she who wears the jade skirt
and fills with oceans our cup,
as is it from the obsidian mountains
to the Mictlán.



In the name of Chicomecóatl,
who holds the sun and the rain to her will,
agile creator of nurturement.

I cleanse my plate, my art and my fate
in the hopes of shrining your table one day.

Blessed be this existence we call resistance.
Blessed be the teeth that chew the paste of life.
Blessed be the sisterhood that provides it.



IV

MEN OF CORN

Before the sun rose,
before the four pillars became the beacon of our compasses,
the gods couldn't keep track of the passing shadows,
what today we call time
and has always been day and night,

Benevolent Heart of Sky and Feathered Serpent
brought animals to life
but their mouths couldn't sing songs of worship.
Later came those whose vocal cords got stuck in the mud
and its successors,
build with the hardest wood and the weakest souls.
Yet, their wrinkled hands didn't give up
and made mistakes into mortals,
crafting cardinal points into feet,
binding them with gravity.



Colorful corn ears entered their flesh
nourished their limbs and mouths
and before the moon went down
their gentle eyes opened
to behold the rest of their lives,
the first and last era of human kind.

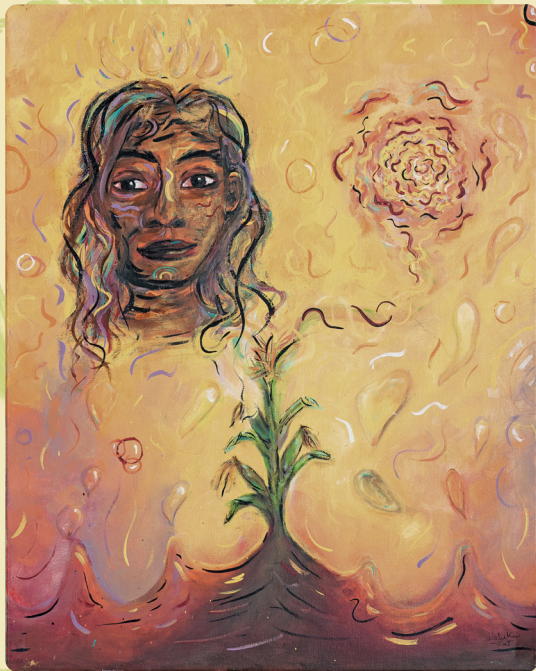


V NAKAWÉ

Great grandmother unleashed the gods after the flood,
each one of them a soul, a moment, an essence;
each one of them an atom ready to expand like pixels on a screen
composing colors, shapes and smells of the Sierra Madre.

She opened her mind to her children,
raising the sun and casting spells of harvest and growth,
teaching them about the mysteries that only light can unfold,
clarifying their sight,
tapping into the potential of what laid below their feet.

Under her wind, the deities found their homes,
the spaces where the spirit could manifest its presence
in the shape of a mountain, a creek,
a cricket, a stack,
a drop of honey that falls onto the grass
or a Huichol who smiles at the fields,
because she knows that Nakawé lives in both the corn
and the wind that makes songs
when it blows kisses through the leaves.



VI

SPROUTING HEART

Mustn't you travel too far to find the beginning
for we all live there and at all times it's part of us,
through machines and lonely beats,
looking within and back to the faults,
the heritage of blood that comes with it,
the pouring of concrete
directly onto our poisoned scars.

One, peaking their eyes of truth and detachment.

Two, made of metal,

Three, born out of asphalt.

Four, lacking connection with everything around

Five, lacking the ivy that could've dig the path between soul
and mind.

And six, slicing the pulse of our corn-made hearts,

missing the point of why we bleed in gold and yellow tones.

Let the leaves and stems grow out of your arteries
and flowing kernels back through the veins,
each one branded with footprints of the weigh
your shoulders bare,
not yours and not for you to get rid of.
For corn thou art, and unto human shalt thou become.



VII

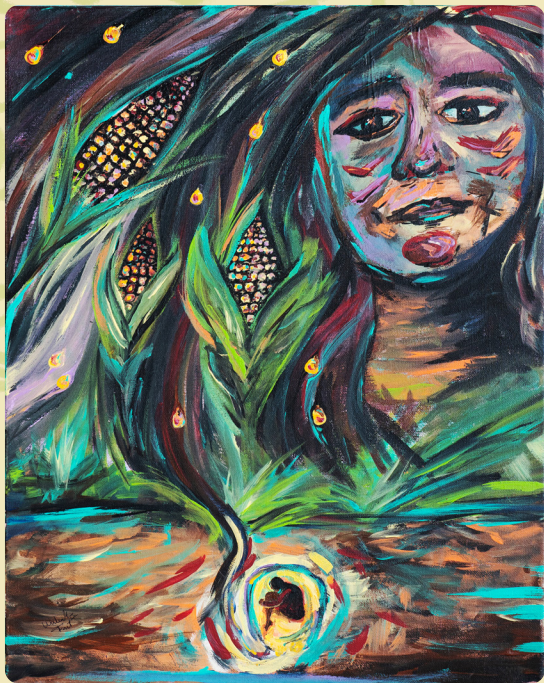
OSSEMA

Ossema came from the clouds
in a time before plants could reach them.
Using the strands of his hair
building stairs on kernel corn swirls
talking in tongues through a humble squirrel.
He who crooned about the treasures of the soil,
enshrined his spirit in the whispers of the wind.

Ossema preached about freedom being the language
of the parent who knows when it's time to teach
and when it's time to leave.
He shrank his presence to say good bye
and making the earth shake was his final act.

He has survived the looting of the pantheon before,
I'm setting in stone my grain of salt,
erase my name from your tongue
instead, breathe in with me Ossema's love
and pour it back into the world,
back into our sacred crop.







ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ARTIST

Venezuelan poet and multidisciplinary artist **Waleska Font** channels her immigrant experiences into promoting biculturality in art. Her work delves into the complexities of bilingualism, sexuality, culture, and identity, all while employing a focused lens on mythology and symbolism.

Driven by her passion for education, she has actively contributed as a resident artist for Artscope and as a sponsored artist for Poetry for Personal Power. Since 2015, her spoken word performances have left a lasting impact, with memorable appearances at the 2nd and 3rd Annual Kansas City Queer Narratives Festival, Show Me Kansas City Pride 2021, and Folk Festival KC in 2023 and 2024.

Waleska is also the founder and program director of the Bicultural Poetry Program at No Divide KC, where she has cultivated partnerships with organizations such as Literacy KC, UMKC, and Sala de Arte. Together, they strive to raise awareness about the healing power of art in the contexts of immigration and cultural adaptation.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Nezka Pfeifer, Museum Curator, Stephen and Peter Sachs Museum

ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

Kernels of Culture: Maize Around the World (May 3, 2024 - March 31, 2025) at the Stephen and Peter Sachs Museum focuses on the complex story of one of the world's most important crop plants, maize (*Zea mays*), which is used by billions of people every day, for food, for animal feed, and as biofuel.

This narrative begins thousands of years ago with the first Indigenous farmers in southern Mexico who hybridized these plants continuously, domesticating the kernels of teosinte (the acknowledged wild grass ancestor to maize) to the corn cobs we grow and use today. The exhibition explores the interdisciplinary intersections of botany, culture, and art to investigate the myriad ways this plant has been embedded in human culture.



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