



# TONANTSINTLALLI

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MOTHER EARTH

Presented by  
**Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga &  
David Marcelino Cayetano**

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Blak Dot Gallery

# Tonantsintlalli

John Thackara  
<http://thackara.com>

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters and pay respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

*Acknowledgment to Country in Nahuatl language*

Nechpakiskiya nixomatis tlen kimokuit-lauiaj nochipa inemillis tonantsintlalli uan toatsin uan nojkia notepanitillis nochipa touejkaueytatauantlamatinij, uan tlen aman itstokej uan tlen ualauij teipan.



“The destruction will stop when we see nature differently, relate differently, understand our purpose here differently”. Those words – from the Spanish priest and philosopher Raimon Pannikar – surely ring true. But how would such a transformation happen? Most of us feel trapped in a world that is mesmerised by all things digital and framed by a form of scientific knowledge based solely on rationality.

Tonantsintlalli is about a different everyday vitality – Mother Earth – experienced in different ways. These ways of knowing, and being, are infused with the values of care, cooperation, and connectedness. Indigenous peoples, in this world, live in harmony with their territory. Empathy with each other, and with all the species that live there, is taken for granted.

These ways of inhabiting the world are literally vital. Although Indigenous lands account for less than 22 percent of the world’s land area, their traditional territories are home to approximately 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity – its life. Also remarkable: whilst ‘systems thinking’ is a novelty for most of us in the industrialised world, sensitivity to ecological systems seems quite natural for those attuned Tonantsintlalli.

Can Indigenous knowledges help us inhabit our own places in a more adaptive and responsive ways? Can connection with these kinds of lived experiences help us redefine development, and progress in our own situations?

Appreciation for the value of traditional ecological knowledge is certainly growing. For one thing, the gap between the two world views has been narrowing. Since the 1980s, especially, scientific

discoveries have undermined the idea that man is separate from nature. From the study of sub-microscopic viruses, yeasts, ants, mosses, lichen, slime moulds and micorriza – to trees, rivers, and climate systems – a profoundly startling picture has emerged. Our planet is a web of interdependent ecosystems. On a molecular, atomic, and viral level, no organism is truly autonomous – and that includes us.

The importance of this new perspective is profound. If our minds are shaped by our physical environments – and are not just a bunch of synapses clicking away inside our box-like skulls – then the division between the thinking self, and the natural world, begins to dissolve. Having worked hard, throughout the modern era, to lift ourselves ‘above’ nature, we are now being told by modern science that man and nature are one, after all.

This is something that Indigenous peoples have known all along. But some words of caution are needed here. Contact with Tonantsintlalli teaches us that indigeneity is a practice, not a thing. This practice is situated, place-specific, and relational. It is shaped by multiple timescales – not all of them linear ones. It exists among an ecology of actors – human and non-human – and the places we inhabit. Indigenous knowledges, it follows – their culture, language, history, and ways of life – are diverse. They are not recipes, as if for a cake. They cannot be extracted, printed on method cards, and applied to people, or places, somewhere else.

Given those qualities, what kind of relationship with Indigenous knowledge should we aspire to – especially people like this writer, me, John Thackara, who are white, male, and privileged?

Our first responsibility, I believe, is to deepen our connections with our own places. The ‘work that reconnects’, of the kind taught by Joanna Macy, develops an understanding that we are part of a living world, not its external observer. The addition of ecology and systems literacy can enhance the capacity for attention, attunement, and care that we now lack.

The work of reconnection is not incompatible with scientific enquiry. On the contrary: scientific and Indigenous knowledge



can complement each other and expand a shared menu of potential insights. Whether it's eDNA analysis used to diagnose the condition of damaged soils or Artificial Intelligence that translates Indigenous languages, new technologies can be positively transformative, too.

In his new book *Gaia Alchemy*, the English scientist and ecologist Stephan Harding describes the reintegration of rationality and intuition, science, and soul as a living process right now. One way to be fair and respectful in our relationship with other knowledges is to change the words learning from to learning with. With a commitment to collective learning, we can combine knowledge systems of South and North, learn from a multiplicity of approaches and, in Arturo Escobar's words, “inhabit a world where many worlds fit – a pluriverse”.

# A multidimensional Mother Earth: Tonantsintlalli

Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga

Instagram: decolonising\_indigenousdesign

For us, Indigenous peoples, we belong to the land, the land does not belong to us. We live in oneness with our Mother Earth, she is our everything, with her everything, without her nothing. She nurtures us, she is wise, and teaches us to read and understand her. Such as life, she can be gentle, caring, loving but if we do not understand her or we do not take care of her she can give us tough love. She is alive and she feels, she feels us, she feels other Entities.

Indigenous cosmology is multidimensional, and it includes the material and the immaterial, it is not linear. The tangible and intangible are relational, it is interconnected in a complex manner. The multiple dimensions include Tonantsintlalli – Mother Earth in Nahuatl, one of my ancestors' language, this is the material and tangible space where we live, we can practice culture, we can dance, sing, apapachar (hug for the soul), we can fell and have emotions, we can make mistakes and learn, we can take care of and work Country – Land to nurture ourselves with sacred food, we can connect to our spirit animals physically, we can be part of community and understand our role in our community. We need to follow law and practice values, we have responsibility and relational accountability, we connect to kinship, family and we understand our purpose in life guided by Place. As Aunty Mary Graham describes Place is not just physical Country/Land, but a time in place and space. With Tonantsintlalli, we have our diverse ways of being, knowing and doing towards becoming. As Aunty Mary Graham ground us saying 'I am located, therefore I am'. As Indigenous peoples and communities, we are located, therefore we are.

Ilhuicatl – the upper world, a space for teaching where our ancestors co-exist. In this dimension our ancestors guide us, they teach us how to understand and read Country, and knowledge. We must connect spiritually, through dreaming and practice deep observation with patience to absorb knowledge like all the Entities in the world. This requires a different type of connection, a spiritual connection with a material connection with the natural elements in Mother Earth. We must deeply understand, observe, and learn from fire, water, earth, and air in all its forms. We need to understand them separately and together, in connection with all Entities and the Land.

Ostoteotl – the underworld, the place to learn. In this place we deeply listen, dream, feel and offer. A place to find purpose, to answer questions, to have visions, to feel the nahuales – energies that are around us, that guide us to our pathway and challenges we must overcome. We practice and embrace this connection grounded on Country using sacred medicine, beverages, and foods.

All these dimensions are connected by the law of relationality with respect. They cannot be separated, they co-exist, each culture in a diverse Country/Land connects in different forms, and we must embrace these cultural practices and knowledges. Our methodologies are onto-epistemological, which means our practices are not separated from theory and knowledge, they are relational.

This exhibition is for you to deeply connect to the material and immaterial, with the multiple dimensions that we live and to open your mind and heart to different worldviews, a Nahua and Maya worldview. This exhibition is for my ancestors to show them that even after colonisation and the loss of so much knowledge, we can start recovering and conserving the knowledge that is within us; the knowledge that cannot go away as if we connect with them, our community and family physically and spiritually, with ourselves through our intuition, feelings, and emotions, and with Mother Earth material and immaterial we can regenerate Indigenous knowledge. I offer this exhibition for them, to thank them for who I am, and the knowledge I acquire through them. I am proud and grateful to be an Indigenous woman.

# TONANTSINTLALLI

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MOTHER EARTH

*Collaborative curated  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga,  
Moorina Bonini and  
Kimba Thompson*

The creative practitioners Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga, Nahua (Aztec), Chamula (Mayan), and Euskaldunak (Basque) woman and Marcelino Cayetano, Nahua–Mexika man welcome you to appreciate the multidimensional reality through a series of photographs, video, and designs from Mexico and Australia to understand the real world with its material and immaterial connections through deep listening, observation, sensation, and appreciation.

This exhibition is for you to be immersed in the multidimensional world we exist in and connect with the material and immaterial. To have relationality with Tonantsintlalli – Our Madrecita Tierra. The connection with EVERYTHING.

They invite you to slow down and feel the textures, sounds, colours, shapes, structures, dimensions, and energies in a more detailed manner and to imagine or remember, while connecting the past with the present understanding the non–linear time in Indigenous worldviews.

Look at the whole, the diverse dimensions, and understand Country as a unit, the relationship of everything, how everything is interconnected through the law of relationality. Go beyond the tangible world and think about the material and immaterial together, the connection between all entities through acknowledgement of the importance of culture, language, relationships, and connections.

Currently, we move towards the womb of our Mother Earth (Tonantsintlalli), since we come from her and we return to her. With her, everything; without her, nothing. We need to revive the learning of caring for her. The creative practitioners invite you to a live experience of the interconnections through ways of knowing and doing.



*Paintings In Lak'ech  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga*

*Wood and acrylic*

*20 cm  
50 cm*

*In Lak'ech sculpture*  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga

*Resin 3D printed*



## In Lak'ech sculpture

In Lak'ech is a Mayan tradition to honour the greeting of someone else humbly and beautifully. Through the In Lak'ech sculpture the artists are welcoming you to the exhibition. You can interact with the sculpture and enter the exhibition. The sculpture is telling you "In Lak'ech" and you need to answer "Hala K'in" which means "I am another you, as you are another me". If you want to deeply understand In Lak'ech law, pop to the other side of the wall and read the saying that will reveal its meaning of real relationality.

In Lak'ech is a saying which means deeper relationality. Relationality between all the entities in the world, not only people but Country, living and non-living things. It is unity, being in oneness.

### *Nahuatl*

Ta tikenna.

Tlan nimitsyolkokos,  
na noselli nimoyolkokua.

Tlan nimitstlasojtla uan nimitstepanita, nimitstlasojtla uan  
nimotepanita.

### *Spanish*

Tú eres mi otro yo.

Si te hago daño a ti,  
me hago daño a mi mismo. Si te amo y respeto,  
me amo y respeto.

### *English*

You are my other me.

If I do harm to you,  
I do harm myself.  
If I love and respect you,  
I love and respect myself.

*Iluikatl & Ostoteotl*  
– The upper and under-  
world paintings  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga

*Collage of natural  
objects and painting.*

*75 x 75 cm each*



## Iluikatl & Ostoteotl

### The upper and underworld

These paintings represent the upper and underworld. They allow you to enter the multidimensional world – opening your senses to multidimensions and layers – connecting through relationality.

These paintings are about the connection between the Material and Immaterial, the Reality and Spirituality, and diverse Indigenous worldviews.

In Nahua cosmology, the upperworld exists – Iluikatl = cielo and it is for our spirits and ancestors who guide us and take care of us. The real world we live in, Mother Earth = Tonantsintlalli – Madre Tierra; and the underworld = Ostoteotl – inframundo, the place of the dead, where we seed or plant our deceased people = Titokatij. The place of the dead is Miktlampa. All these dimensions are connected in this world, and they live in the same Place and space.



*Tonantsintlalli /  
Mother Earth  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga*

*177 photographs  
12 m wall*

*Available for purchase  
to support the Mexican  
artist's flight and  
expenses. Please speak  
with the manager or  
Blak Dot director.*

Mother Earth = Tonantsintlalli is relationality, is the material, is the immaterial; she feeds us, she nurtures us, she is our everything.

In the wisdom of our ancestors, it is said that when everything was already lost, we humans, were reborn thanks to the corn that our Mother Earth made sprout. That is why we come from the heart of the corn. We are the corn people, sons of the corn. That is why everything that is found on Mother Earth is of great respect. We do rituals for the corn, the living beings, and for the sacred energies that made our existence possible. These energies know when to provide.

Corn is sacred for us; it was offered so that we could be born again. In Mexico, we do the corn ceremony, this corn has different colours responding to this diversity, but understanding that we are one. Our Mother Earth gives us the opportunity to be born again by offering. She nourished the soil and gave it fresh water to grow corn. We are the corn people. Also, we are grateful to different animals that gave us life, take care of us, guide us, they are our spiritual animals.



## Agave Furniture (Metl – Nahuatl)



*Agave*  
By Desiree Ibinarriaga

*Furniture-sculpture*  
Materials: Fabric,  
timber, stainless steel  
and sand.  
1.52 m

Agave o Maguey comes from the Mayáhuel, the goddess of maguey, the fertility and inebriation for the Mexicas (Nahuas). Agave or maguey is used to make several drinks such as mezcal, tequila and pulque.

A long time ago, here on earth there was a lot of sadness and the humans seemed to have no life, so the sacred energies told themselves that they would send the Metl woman to give them their medicine. And one day as planned Metl came, and she really liked being here with Mother Earth. She saw that there was a lot of sadness in humanity; then she spoke to a man who was passing by and told him to do what she ordered.

Metl transformed herself into a beautiful maguey / agave plant with a beautiful green skirt. And she said to the man: 'gently scrape me from the bottom and leave a hole, then come back tomorrow morning, take the juice that will be on the bottom of my heart, and drink it'. After doing what Metl asked, the man started to feel. He looked at her with great happiness coming from his heart and danced; to which Metl told him to give them to the other people to be happy. This man did so, he shared the medicine from Metl's own essence and thus, humanity regained happiness. Metl and humans worked together and were together happily ever after. This medicine today is called Mezcal and comes from the Agave plant.



## Tsontiajakatl – The last wind

By David Marcelino  
Cayetano

Movie  
18 minutes

### **Tsontiajakatl – El Último Viento – The last wind** **Synopsis**

#### *Nahuatl*

Pan se chinankotsin naua tlen itokax Sokitipa pan Kuextekapantlalli, se ueyatatsin tlen itokax Jose Gonzalez, ya nochipa kichia kampika tlen ma amo ixpoliui mijtotilistli Kuaxonpiatinij ika se keski siuatsitsij tlen pan ni chinanko moyol-chiuilliaj tlen nochipa panon keman kinpakisitaj noijki nopuna kampa euaj uan yoksejko tlen itlatilanka Tamasunchale, tlen nojkia ixpoliui Nauatlajtolli uan miak tlamantli tlen neljuayolxochikauanilistli tlen telpokamej uan konemej axka kinekij kamanaltisej innint-lajtol uan innijuantij san kinekij kamanaltisej koyotlajtolli.

#### *English*

In the Nahua community of Zoquitipa in the Huasteca Potosina, José González, an Elder musician, fights to preserve the 'Danza de las Varitas', Dance of the Wands, with a group of women from the town. They are fighting against ethnic discrimination inside and outside the municipality of Tamazunchale, and the loss of the Nahuatl language and traditions by the new generations who are taught to speak Spanish.

## Iluikatl & Ostoteotl videos

By David Marcelino  
Cayetano

2 videos  
1 minute each

### **Iluikatl / cielo – para los espíritus / upperworld**

In heaven there are spirits and our ancestors, Sometimes they also work and manifest/show up. You will hear them when it rains, when there is thunder and when there is a flash of lightning in the sky. They teach you; this is a teaching dimension. These are things our grandparents have told us, that these spirits are of respect.

### **Ostoteotl / Cueva sagrada – inframundo / underworld**

When someone goes into a cave that is in the mountain, one is required to prepare, to do fasting. It is not only to go see what happens or to have "experiences", because that place is well known for being sacred.

In this place, there are also energies that can heal you or show you the pathway to take, because they are wise about everything that is found on Our Mother Earth.

Sometimes one can enter that other dimension and come back. If you, do it, you must do it with respect. In this dimension you learn, you listen, you ask for permission, you offer, you work energetically and spiritually, you connect with Our Mother Earth, you purify yourself. They teach you what is your food to heal, what is your purification, what is your purpose in life. This is a learning dimension.



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## About the artists/designers

### **Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga**

Instagram: [decolonising\\_indigenusdesign](#)

Desiree Hernandez Ibinarriaga is an Indigenous Mexican woman with Nahua (Aztec), Chamula (Mayan), and Euskaldunak (Basque) heritage. Desiree is a creative practitioner and a collaborative and social design maker and thinker. She is a Lecturer at Monash Art Design and Architecture, and a Coordinator for Indigenous Higher Degrees by Research at the Wominjeka Djeembana Research Lab.

With over 14 years of experience in the design field, across disciplines including decolonising design, Indigenous design, sustainability, social design, furniture and interior design, Desiree's practice focuses on Indigenous peoples' building of capacity and finding better ways of forming partnerships, collaboration, and communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through design. Desiree's purpose is acknowledging and recognising the relationality between people and Place, while privileging Indigenous knowledges, by enhancing biocultural diversity conservation and regeneration towards collaborative resilience, cultural identity and pride, and sustainability.

### **David Marcelino Cayetano**

Instagram: [tlatonitsin](#)

David Marcelino Cayetano, of Nahua–Mexika ancestral roots, has been dedicated to audio–visual art, photography, muralism, poetry, and music from the worldview of his original peoples, for more than seven years. He is a teacher of his native Nahuatl language and a promoter of traditional medicine, knowledge of which was passed on to him by his grandparents. He published a book on the legends of nature and sacred places of the Huasteca “Kamanaltlajtolmej Xilitlan / Narratives in Náhuatl de Xilitla”. Throughout his career he has documented the wisdom of his ancestors such as language, dances, medicine ceremonies, traditions, customs, etc.

David has served as a community authority in his own community with the position of Municipal Delegate. He studied civil engineering at the Regiomontana University. During his stay in Monterrey, he was a producer and host of the TV/Radio program “Voces Originarias” on TuVoxTV.

He has also made murals from his ancestral worldview and is passionate about everything related to the traditional medicine of his ancestors, which was passed on to him, as well as teaching classes of Náhuatl. He currently makes Indigenous cinema and is the co-founder of the independent film production house “Bironga Films”, which has presented his audio–visual works in the National Cinema, National Mask Museum, Institute of Anthropological Research, National School of Languages, Linguistics and Translation of UNAM, among other cultural and academic spaces.

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‘I am located,  
therefore, I am’

– Mary Graham



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