



SUMMUS

# ARTE INC.

Arte primitivo





By Andrés Ramírez  
 Paintings images: Courtesy  
 of Cristina Rodríguez Studio

By ———— **Andrés Ramírez, Bogotá**  
 Photos ———— **Camilo George / Cortesía estudio Cristina Rodríguez**

# Primitive Art

The work of the artist Cristina Rodríguez focuses on nature as a pictorial approach. The figurative elements are a way of expressing the artist's particular conception of the landscape and the relationship of human beings with their environment.

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It is a coincidence that the interview with the artist Cristina Rodríguez is taking place in La Candelaria, the historical center of Bogotá. And it is a coincidence because it is on these narrow streets that the basis of her work was first formed. To her, walking today in front of the Library Luis Ángel Arango is like shaking a box full of forgotten memories.

Maybe that is why, from the beginning, her words take on a nostalgic and chronologic tone with the memories of her youth slowly emerging. She explains how, after living in Peru and Germany, she came back to Colombia to her last year of the Baccalaureate. It was the Seventies and the country was experiencing a cultural and artistic boom. The University of Los Andes, for example, had just reopened its Arts Faculty. It had an experimental rather than technical approach, and had teachers like the artist Maripaz Jaramillo, Humberto Giangrandi and Lorenzo Jaramillo, among others of their standard.

Ever since she was young, Cristina Rodríguez has always felt inclined to aesthetics and creativity, however her knowledge of painting techniques were limited when she began her Fine Arts Degree in the University of Los Andes. "I didn't even know how to use turpentine. I have painted before, but nothing close to the intricate level of a work of art." But her curiosity and the guidance of teachers like Master Santiago Cárdenas would soon help her to improve her work and develop the basis for her future art. "When Santiago Cárdenas first walked into the room I noticed how perfectly he was dressed. He later told us that it was better to dress like a





***She knows that  
their Adventure  
has just begun***

2009  
Oil on canvas  
91x61 cm

like a lawyer and paint like an artist, than to dress like an artist and paint like a lawyer."

Santiago Cárdenas' lectures were essential because they tore down some of the stereotypes that were imposed on the world of art in that time.

"From him I learned that art is a personal construction of the artist, and that a good painting doesn't respond to considerations outside those of the person who creates it. You can't create a painting thinking of anyone else but yourself. Painting is telling something through colours and shapes."

This is how Cristina Rodríguez fell in love with painting, although some of her fellow students found her too figurative and too alien to the current of the time, where what was written about art was more important than art itself. "I used to go and see the work of my fellow students

and, to be honest, there were things I couldn't understand, very dark and very ugly. What I did like was the music they always put as part of their projects. I've always believed that music has the power of affecting the senses, of making people feel things that nothing else can make you feel."

She decided then that her dissertation would be a full exhibition in which she would plan everything, from the design of the invitation to the creation of the staging. "I got inspiration from the concert *Pictures at an Exhibition*, by the Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881), who was one of the fathers of narrative music." The exhibition took place at the Foundation Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, and had Otto de Greiff as a judge. "From that moment, I understood that the perspective of my work should include

everything: The paintings, the conception of the space, the staging, the design of the catalogues and the invitations. For me, Art has never been about the mechanical job of doing and selling paintings, but about creating each painting with honesty, with joy and with imagination."

**EUROPEAN VISION**

University gave Cristina Rodríguez the opportunity to open her mind to the world, but she still felt that she should continue to improve her technique. "Everyone can write and read, but you need a lot of skill, a lot of discipline and talent to be able to write a book. In Art, everyone can paint, but not everyone has the skill, the talent and the discipline to create an everlasting work of art."



***La Source  
(d'après Ingres)***

2012  
Oil on canvas  
42x31 cm





To Cristina Rodriguez, Art has never been about a mechanical job of creation and selling paintings, but about creating each painting with honesty, with joy and with imagination.

For that reason, as soon as she graduated, she devoted herself to paint the different landscapes she could see from the window of her room, which faced a gorge that came down from the eastern hills of Bogotá. She painted the builders working, the kids coming down from the mountains in carts, the recyclers who carried the waste of the neighborhood.

During her free time, she worked as a guide in several exhibitions, staged at the Library Luis Ángel Arango, like the exhibition "Four Latin-American Masters".

This exhibition had a great impact on her, as artists who she had always admired, like Armando Morales, were exhibiting. She prepared the guide as carefully as if it was her own exhibition. When the exhibition was over, the artist Beatriz González offered her a position. "I was very grateful, but had to decline it, as it was impossible for me to start a career as an artist without focusing full time on it. I think my reply impressed her, as later on she helped me obtain a grant to do a two-year Master Degree in Painting in London."

Cristina Rodriguez went to the prestigious The Slade School of Fine Art, at the University of London, an institution renowned for its technical approach. She studied for two years, swimming from the beginning against the current fashion in Europe at that time. Her portfolio displayed figurative work, primitive in its shapes, suggestive in its colour and with the obvious influence of her Latin-American background. Around her she found that minimalism was imposing itself over neo-expressionism, that everything that wasn't abstract seemed too obvious. "I paint what I see, and generally I see the moon and the stars" she used to tell her fellow students and teachers.

Studying the work of Cristina Rodriguez, one can see from the beginning some elements, such as an uninhibited use of colour and the presence of human figure. It is an optimistic work, if you will, that pursues beauty and does not question or observe in depth the miseries that surround our world. "Life is very hard on all of us, and colour gives strength, stimulates our senses, connects us with nature. Strangely, people with the greatest problems and needs are the ones who appreciate beauty the most."





Cristina Rodriguez continued painting and studying in London for two years, always feeling that each painting should be technically better than the previous one. She always wanted to improve the quality of the strokes, find a better colour balance and correct issues with perspective, brightness and light contrast. At the same time, she aimed to broaden her horizons by attending anthropology and history lectures, and by visiting art exhibitions, concerts and literary conferences. Those were years of intellectual growth that prepared her to place herself as a global artist. During her time at University she also had the opportunity to travel around the world, selling her paintings to fund her journeys. She remembers her travels to Russia and Turkey with particular fondness. She recorded these two places in a small sketchbook that, once back in her London studio, she transformed into paintings. This habit has never left her.

To the artist, drawing is an activity that demands equal portions of inspiration and technique. After studying Fine Arts in the University of Los Andes, she moved to London to do a Masters Degree in Painting at The Slade School of Fine Arts. This allowed her to incorporate new techniques as well as to improve her work around colour.

For her Degree Show, as she had done in Bogotá, Cristina Rodriguez decided that her final project should be something special. It was a group exhibition of all the students in which everyone was able to pick a space of his choice. She then decided that, for the first time, she would do a big format painting (5 x 4 meters), as she had found a big wall on the entrance of the exhibition hall that was perfect. She worked non-stop for weeks to finish the painting. On the day of the opening of the exhibition, she was urgently summoned by the Director of The Slade School of Fine Arts. "He told me I couldn't show only one painting that the exhibition was about the whole of my work during my two years at the Masters Degree. I explained to him that I didn't have any other paintings, that I had sold them all, and that the painting I was showing summarized all of what I had learned during that period. He told me that I wouldn't be able to graduate and that he would give instructions to take the painting off the wall.

I told him to do what he wanted, that I didn't need a qualification to certify what I had learned". Cristina Rodriguez arrived at the opening that night with the idea of viewing the work of her fellow students, but she was surprised to see that, not only had not taken her painting down, but that it was the most commented on by the audience.

Furthermore, at the end of the evening, she even sold the painting to a renowned collector. "I asked him why he wanted it, and he said that he couldn't explain why, but that enormous landscape reminded him of moments of his life". The famous artist Gillian Ayres chose her, on that night, to feature in an exhibition of small format at The Mall Galleries the following year and the Spanish philanthropist Delfina Entrecanales, director of the Delfina Foundation, was another of the observers with whom she spoke. Impressed by the quality of her work, Mrs. Entrecanales asked Cristina Rodriguez to apply for a



***The Florist  
in Portobello  
Road***

2011  
Oil on canvas  
41x43 cm



grant at her foundation.

So she did. Whilst she was waiting for a reply, the artist survived on the savings she had accrued from the selling of her paintings and lived in a tiny flat where she had to fold her bed every morning in order to have enough space to paint. "It was a defining moment, because I had the money and the time to do things other than painting. But I found myself taken over by my work and never stopped".

The following year, she had the exhibition at The Mall Galleries, she had her first solo exhibition in London at The Cadogan Gallery and she was awarded the Delfina Studios Scholarship. She moved to a house containing artists from around the world. The year after, she was awarded a scholarship to live and paint in Zimbabwe where she worked closely with the tribal art of local communities. Two years later, she was awarded a scholarship to live and paint in New York, where she immersed herself in the popular culture and the artistic trends of the Nineties. She had a small studio in Soho.

Then came the recognition of the critics and the exhibitions. During the following two decades, her paintings were exhibited at the most highly regarded venues, such as Carrousel du Louvre in Paris, where she held a solo exhibition, the Biennale of Florence in Italy and the Museum of Mérida in Mexico. In London she presented four solo exhibitions based on the exhibition spaces: The Carnival of the Animals, Jump into Reality, the Desert is Not Deserted, and Imaginary Landscapes. She was invited to Peru, Chile, Namibia, South Africa, Belgium, France and Spain

to prepare the drawings for different commissions.

Three years ago she moved to Geneva in Switzerland and subsequently to Estoril in Portugal so she could paint by the sea. "I left the light of success behind to paint in silence, to keep growing freely through my paintings. I find myself at a moment of my life when I only want to give colour and joy to the world".

Cristina Rodriguez cannot detach her life from her work as an artist. When she speaks, all the anecdotes and memories are laced with art. This is particularly obvious on this cold afternoon, sitting in a café

facing a street in which she used to frequently walk during her years at University. To her, art feeds on all she has experienced. And it is there, in those primitive and colorful paintings, where the world of Cristina Rodriguez exists.

***Title: David's  
Portrait of  
Monique***

2010  
Oil on canvas  
50x50 cm



— IN LONDON SHE HAS HELD SOLO EXHIBITIONS AT CADOGAN GALLERY (1991), THE PUMP HOUSE GALLERY (1997), THE AIR GALLERY (2001) AND BLENHEIM CRESCENT GALLERY (2006).