

## HOJA SANTA

L'eterno ritorno

(2018 - 2020)

PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT by Maciejka Alicja Art

The Costa Chica ("small coast" in Spanish) extends from Acapulco to the town of Puerto Ángel in Oaxaca in Mexico's Pacific coast. The Costa Chica is not well known to travelers, with few attractions, especially where Afro-Mexicans live.

African identity and physical features are stronger here than elsewhere in Mexico as the slaves here did not intermarry to the extent that others did. Not only are black skin and African features more prominent, there are strong examples of African-based song, dance and other art forms.<sup>[62][63]</sup> Until recently, homes in the area were round mud and thatch huts, the construction of which can be traced back to what are now the Ghana and Ivory Coast. Origin tales often center on slavery. Many relate to a shipwreck (often a slave ship) where the survivors settle here or that they are the descendants of slaves freed for fighting in the Mexican War of Independence.

Hoja Santa is a herb largely used in traditional medicine and kitchen in Costa Chica, Oaxaca.

I met Juliana on a dinner in a friend's house in Oaxaca city and we decided to collaborate on a project about women in the costa chica, in her afro community . She was looking at showing the difficulties of women work , while I wanted to explore femininity and women hood in all it's aspects .

I had been visiting Juliana and her daughter and living with her family for more then a year, in Jose Maria Morelos. I have learned about local tradition and all the aspects of the women society in such a difficult and isolated area of mexico . I met local healers and midwives , who reminded me about the importance of the natural order and the importance of life . But also "queridas" ( mistresses) , abandoned women, widows, single mothers or mothers of many children .

The initial project about women became my own journey, like the shadow line , into the origin , the womb , and back . I found many parallels with my own life and female relationships and suffering , as long as features of feminism and proudness . Every person I met , is a character in the journey . Juliana is a lawyer and she takes care of her teenage daughter, Veronica . Which reminded me about myself growing up with my mum in Lodz . Somehow I experienced some aspects of the difficult relationship mother - daughter through the mirror of my relationship with Juliana . While Lena, the chacalmaca\*\*\* fisherwoman is a very positively maternal character, and the part of the journey with her was very soothing. and the Many characters led me through the journey out of the physical and metaphorical womb .

The nature of the place is very powerful and the village moves according to it rules , the heat is so strong that I was often feeling dizzy . The place is soaked in magic, hidden energies and undiscovered secrets . It feels like the place itself is alive and it has been slowly receiving me a bit more with every visit .

I used mixed media collages and painted photographs to describe aspects of that spell , I can't photograph but I can feel .

The project is still ongoing and quite wide . It has various layers of reading , through the anthropologic tale about the afro Mexican villages, the synchronicity of the catholic and afro culture; its' women who are tough workers and support the local society , and who also live quiet separated from man due to the history of violence of the place ; the traditional medicine and healing technique such as “espanto”(soul retrieval)\* or empacho\*\* “emotional digestion healing” for example ; my personal journey of exploration, submerging myself in the essence of motherhood and women hood , with it's shadows and limitations is all it's aspects - into the womb of mama Africa and back .

Currently the projects is being in the process of transformation into a book, with the Mexican editorial from Cdmx , Hydra + Fotografia .

\* Whenever we suffer a physical or emotional trauma, it is said that a part of our soul flees the body. Getting back these pieces is known as **Soul Retrieval**.

\*\* Empacho, a cultural-dependent illness, is a digestive system disorder caused by over-eating and the ingestion of products difficult to digest or indigestible, which cause problems in gastrointestinal transit ; and from the other hand connected to the emotional digestion of one .

\*\*\*Chacalmaca is a fishing web used in the costa chica to mainly fish precious river shrimps.