¡MUJERES CHÉVERES! – Cool Women!

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¡MUJERES CHÉVERES!
COOL WOMEN

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

By
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Abstract

¡MUJERES CHÉVERES! – Cool Women! is a body of work and writing that looks into the history of feminism and analyzes the activism of Colombian women, highlighting their resilience and spirit. Policarpa Salavarrieta, Maria Cano, Madre Laura Montoya, and Adriana Ocampo are a few examples of Colombian women’s contributions to social movements and gender equality. Movements like “Estamos Listas” in Medellín are discussed for their role in advocating for women’s rights and societal change.

As a self-identified feminist male, this body of work, draws from my upbringing among influential women to investigate the societal roles of Colombian women. This body of work and writing begins by acknowledging the stark contrast between women’s omnipresent nurturing roles and their underrepresentation in power spheres. This disparity motivates the author’s exploration of women’s significant societal roles, making this thesis a homage to these women and a commitment to gender equality.

Personal narratives are interwoven throughout the paper. Through this body of work, I reflect on the profound influences of my grandmother Isabel, my mom, Adriana, and Aunt Gissela. Isabel, a matriarch with a strong faith, contributed to community welfare through activities like crochet, embodying compassion and resilience. Adriana’s endless love helped me to grow up in a safe and caring environment. Gissela’s professional success and commitment to social causes illustrate the multifaceted nature of Colombian womanhood and inspire the author’s personal and professional journey.

This writing also discusses artistic influences on my body of work. The influence of Louise Nevelson’s assemblage technique is evident in the sculptural series, reflecting the narratives of Colombian women. The monochromatic color schemes and material choices in these sculptures resonate with Nevelson’s style, emphasizing form and narrative.
Digital illustration portraiture is another key element of this thesis project. Influences from artists like A.M. Cassandre, Tamara de Lempicka, Edgar Rozo, and Maria Picassó I Piquer help to shape the lexicon and visual styling in the digital illustrations. These illustrations, accompanied by biographical descriptions, aim to convey the essence of influential Colombian women. The project finds a kindred spirit in “Colombiennes” by Jade Vergnes and Hortense Jauffret, which also celebrates Colombian women through visual storytelling.

In summary, this body of work and writing is a complex amalgamation of personal reflection, historical analysis, and artistic exploration. It sheds light on the multifaceted roles of Colombian women in shaping society, underscored by my personal experiences and artistic endeavors.
¡Mujeres Chéveres! – Cool Women: Essay

In the intricate tapestry of Colombian society, women’s indomitable spirit and invaluable contributions have woven threads of strength, resilience, and unwavering dedication. They have played pivotal roles in shaping communities, instilling values, and uplifting those around them. This Master of Fine Arts thesis project is a heartfelt tribute to the Colombian woman and their profound impact on society. This body of work seeks to deconstruct the multifaceted roles of women, drawing inspiration from the remarkable women within my own family (Image 1).

Image 1. Artist’s family: Aunt Gissela, Grandmother Isabel, and mom Adriana.

At the heart of this exploration stands my beloved grandmother, the revered matriarch of our family. Through her unswerving faith in God and relentless effort, she has instilled cherished values in successive generations and extended her contributions to the broader community. A testament to her compassion and creativity, her crochet work and collaboration with a sewing
group have raised funds for nursing homes in our hometown. Her unwavering dedication and transformative teachings provide a glimpse into the countless Colombian women who have selflessly devoted themselves to empowering their communities and nurturing enduring values.

Within my family, my aunt Gissela has stood as a pillar of emotional support, exemplifying dedication and relentless effort in pursuing her dreams. Her unwavering commitment to professional growth has positioned her as a source of pride for our family. Yet, her unyielding determination to utilize her knowledge and social influence for the betterment of marginalized communities truly sets her apart. Her passion, energy, and relentless drive have profoundly influenced my personal and professional growth. She represents many women who have fearlessly pursued their aspirations, channeling their warrior-like spirits to overcome obstacles and realize their dreams.

Finally, my mother, who sacrificed personal ambitions to nurture a loving family, holds a unique place in my heart. In contrast to her sister’s professional pursuits, my mother’s selfless dedication embodies love, tolerance, and unwavering perseverance. Her constant display of genuine affection and steadfast support has shaped me into who I am today. Through her example, she has taught me that the true essence of humanity lies in the continuous practice of love and unwavering support.

One of the primary goals of this thesis project is to create a series of abstract sculptures that visually represent the women in my life and the characteristics and values they embody. Through the transformative power of art, these sculptures capture the essence of each woman’s strength, resilience, dedication, and unwavering spirit. By transcending literal representation and delving into emotions and symbolism, the sculptures invite viewers to reflect upon Colombian women’s diverse roles, contributions, and profound societal influence.
Colombian Women: A Personal Reflection

As a man who identifies as a feminist, the decision to embark on this thesis project about Colombian women stems from a deeply personal place. Growing up surrounded by women, I experienced firsthand their profound impact on the fabric of everyday life. Despite their omnipresence and pivotal role in nurturing and shaping our lives, I noticed a stark contrast in their representation in spheres of power. This disparity laid the foundation for my interest in exploring and highlighting women’s significant yet often underrepresented societal roles.

From a young age, observing the women in my family and community, I was struck by their resilience, capacity for empathy, and unyielding spirit. The way they navigated the challenges of daily life, often balancing multiple roles with grace and strength, was inspiring and indicative of a broader narrative that needed to be told. My thesis, therefore, is not just an academic pursuit; it is autobiographical and a personal homage to the women who shaped my worldview and a reflection of my commitment to gender equality.

Colombia, my homeland, has been scarred by decades of conflict, and it is here that the role of women takes on an even more poignant dimension. Many Colombian women have been at the forefront of efforts to rebuild our country, heal war wounds, and forge a path toward peace and reconciliation (Sanchez, 2016). Their stories are not just tales of survival but testament to an indomitable will to create a better future for the next generation. In capturing these stories through this body of work, I aim to shed light on the invaluable contributions of these women to our society and culture.

As an artist, I recognize the importance of using my voice to amplify the stories of women, especially in a society where gender disparities are prevalent. This project is an opportunity for me to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and to advocate for
the recognition and respect that Colombian women rightfully deserve. By highlighting their struggles, victories, and unyielding dedication to their communities, I hope to provide a platform for their voices and experiences to be heard and appreciated.

My interest in this project is driven by a combination of personal experiences and a deep-seated belief in the principles of Feminism. It is a tribute to Colombian women’s strength, resilience, and spirit, whose roles in shaping our society are invaluable yet often overlooked. Through my work, I aspire to honor these women and inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation of their contributions across all strata of society.
A Brief Story About Feminism

According to Nuria Varela, a Spanish writer and journalist, Feminism is understood as a social and political movement that seeks gender equality and has been primarily led and followed by women in their fight for civil rights. This movement emerged in the 18th century with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, marking a contradiction in the inequality of rights between men and women. Figures like Nicolas de Condorcet and Mary Wollstonecraft were prominent during this era, although the struggle for equality faced obstacles like the Napoleonic Civil Code (Varela, 2005, p. 28). Philosophers like Georg Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer perpetuated misogynistic views of women, later criticized by thinkers like Alexander Téllez Aguilar. In his book “The Undesirable Woman: Hegel’s Model of the Feminine” (2009), Aguilar criticizes Hegel for viewing women as domestic objects and replaceable singularities, while men are seen as a universality on which women are always dependent. (Téllez, 1991, p. 310)

In the 19th century, the United States saw the rise of the suffragette movement, which focused on political and educational rights for women. The 20th century brought significant advancements, especially with England’s women’s suffrage law in 1917. However, the fight for labor and economic equality continued.

During and after World War II, the role of women in society was a subject of debate and transformation. Key figures like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan promoted equality and economic independence for women (Varela, 2005, p. 84). The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of radical Feminism, which sought to transform both public and private spaces, focusing on sexuality and reproductive rights (Varela, 2005, p. 102).
Feminism has undergone various phases and challenges, including diversity of opinions and approaches within the movement. Despite achievements, gender inequalities, discrimination, and stereotypes still persist. Feminism continues to evolve and fight for the equality and recognition of women in all aspects of life.
Colombian Women as Agents of Social Change

Colombian women have emerged as influential agents of social change, leaving an indelible mark on the nation’s history through their active participation in social movements. This chapter delves into the historical involvement of Colombian women in these transformative movements, highlighting their unwavering passion for women’s rights, social justice, and gender equality while also examining the profound impact their activism has had on society.

Throughout Colombian history, women have played pivotal roles in various social movements, challenging societal norms and advocating for progressive change. From the early struggles for independence to modern-day fights against inequality, Colombian women have stood at the forefront, fearlessly voicing their demands for justice and equality. Their historical involvement is exemplified by notable figures such as Policarpa Salavarrieta, a brave revolutionary who sacrificed her life for Colombian independence. By examining the historical narratives of these extraordinary women, we gain insight into the challenges they faced, the barriers they shattered, and the lasting legacies they have left behind.

Passion for women’s rights, social justice, and gender equality has been a driving force behind the activism of Colombian women. They have fought tirelessly to dismantle patriarchal structures, challenge gender-based violence, and secure equal opportunities for all (Wadekar, 2019). Their unwavering commitment to these causes has ignited powerful movements, mobilizing communities and driving meaningful change. Colombian feminists, such as Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda, Carmen Waugh, and Margarita Londoño, have galvanized support for gender equality and played instrumental roles in shaping the feminist discourse in Colombia (Dominguez, 2021; UNAL, 2019). Their fervent advocacy inspires women across generations and fosters a collective determination to achieve a more equitable society.
The transformative influence of Colombian women’s activism cannot be understated. Their tireless efforts have shattered societal barriers and paved the way for progress in numerous domains. We are Ready or “Estamos Listas” in Medellín have championed women’s rights affected by violence and displacement and initiated broader societal shifts. By shedding light on the struggles faced by marginalized communities and advocating for policy reforms, these movements have brought about tangible improvements in the lives of countless individuals (Foggin, 2021). The transformative power of Colombian women’s activism resonates beyond their immediate spheres, creating ripples of change that shape the fabric of society.
Unveiling the Complexity of Colombian Womanhood Through Family

Drawing inspiration from the remarkable women within my own family is essential to truly understanding and appreciating the depth of Colombian womanhood. Through their diverse roles and their impact on their communities, we can uncover the layers of complexity that define the Colombian female experience. By examining their stories, values, and contributions, we gain valuable insights into their roles’ significance in shaping Colombian society’s fabric.

My grandmother, as the matriarch of our family, has played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of Colombian womanhood. With her unwavering effort and deep faith in God, she has instilled values in our family’s new generations and significantly contributed to various communities. One notable example of her dedication is her involvement in crochet work and a sewing group. Through these activities, she has not only honed her skills but also used them as a means to give back to society. Her crochet work, along with the collective efforts of her sewing group, has raised funds to support nursing homes in our hometown, providing vital resources and assistance to those in need.

The impact of my grandmother’s involvement in these community projects goes beyond the tangible results. It exemplifies her commitment to caring for others and fostering a sense of solidarity within her community. By engaging in these activities, she has demonstrated the transformative power of compassion and the importance of using one’s talents to make a positive difference. Her selflessness and dedication are a powerful example to me and countless Colombian women who aspire to contribute to their communities and uplift those around them.

Furthermore, my grandmother’s resilience in the face of personal adversity is another testament to the strength of Colombian women. When my grandfather passed away, she faced immense sorrow, but instead of succumbing to her grief, she channeled her love into raising her
new grandson. Her ability to replace sadness with love and create a nurturing environment has impacted our family. Her actions show Colombian women have the strength to overcome hardships and turn them into opportunities for growth and love.

My grandmother’s dedication, resilience, and teachings provide a profound panorama of the thousands of Colombian women who, like her, have given the best of their faith to help their communities and instill admirable values in people. Her remarkable journey and the values she embodies shed light on the countless Colombian women who have worked tirelessly to build a better society. As we explore the complexities of Colombian womanhood, her story stands as a testament to Colombian women’s indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment to shaping our nation’s social, cultural, and moral fabric.

In addition to my grandmother, my aunt has played a significant role in shaping the narrative of Colombian womanhood. She has been an unwavering source of emotional support and an inspiring example of dedication and effort in pursuing her goals and dreams. She has dedicated herself to personal and professional growth throughout her life, using her knowledge and skills to help others.

One of the remarkable aspects of my aunt Gissela’s journey is her relentless pursuit of professional success. She has consistently strived to excel in her chosen field, and her determination has positioned her favorably in her career. However, what sets her apart is not just her achievements but also her unwavering commitment to making a positive impact on society. She has always used her social position and influence to uplift the most disadvantaged communities, raising funds and mobilizing people to support various social causes.

My aunt Gissela’s intense drive and energy are a remarkable example for me in my emotional and professional growth. Her resilience and willingness to forge her path have inspired
me to pursue my dreams with the same warrior spirit. Like my aunt, many Colombian women have defied societal expectations and embarked on their journeys of personal and professional fulfillment. They have embraced their ambitions, pushing boundaries and proving they can achieve greatness.

Through her actions and accomplishments, my aunt exemplifies the multifaceted nature of Colombian womanhood. She embodies the strength, determination, and resilience qualities that characterize many Colombian women who have ventured beyond traditional roles and achieved remarkable success. Her story highlights the power of Colombian women to create change, both in their personal lives and the broader society.

Furthermore, my aunt’s commitment to using her knowledge and resources to help others demonstrates Colombian women’s compassionate and nurturing nature. Her dedication to supporting disadvantaged communities and advocating for social causes is a testament to the deep-rooted values of empathy and solidarity that Colombian women hold dear. She has shown me the profound impact that one person can have when they harness their skills and resources for the betterment of others.

In examining the complexities of Colombian womanhood, my aunt’s journey and contributions serve as a powerful reminder of the remarkable women who have used their personal and professional growth as a catalyst for positive change. Through her example, I have learned that Colombian women can achieve their aspirations while uplifting their communities, embodying the true spirit of Colombian womanhood.
The Sculptures

My inaugural sculpture “Isabel” (Image 3) is not merely a form in wood; it is a living act of memory dedicated to my grandmother Isabel, one of the most pivotal influences in my life. The choice to begin my artistic journey with her as the subject stems from profound contemplation brought on by the physical distance between us and her venerable age. These circumstances have heightened my awareness of her impact on my existence and kindled the need to honor her legacy. The memories of the times we shared and the lessons she imparted are what shape this piece. In every curve, I aim to capture the essence of her influence on my childhood and my formation as a human being.

Image 2. Isabel, 2023, Mixed media, 71” x 27” x 60”
My grandmother has been a heroine in the most genuine and tangible sense. She embodies the strength and resilience often attributed to mythical figures, yet with a palpable humanity. The loss of her husband just before I entered the world could have been an insurmountable blow. Yet, she rose above tragedy with admirable grace and strength, turning her grief into unconditional love for me. Her ability to turn pain into something constructive, to not let sorrow overshadow the beauty of new beginnings, has imprinted itself on me. This sculpture seeks to reflect that transformation from pain to love, a lesson manifested in the sculpted figure’s upright stance and forward gaze.

The values my grandmother Isabel instilled in me are as enduring and foundational as the material from which this sculpture is made. Though not shared in my faith, her religious devotion has taught me the importance of believing in something greater than oneself, be it a community, a principle, or a purpose. She passed on to me the value of service to others, showing by her example that the true meaning of life lies in what we do for others. Her lessons of unconditional love, devotion to family, and living a life guided by kindness and selflessness are gifts I cherish more each passing year. This sculpture is intended to be a physical reflection of those values, a manifestation of the principles she embodied and which I now strive to live by each day.

“Isabel” is a visual narrative of my grandmother’s life, telling her story through texture and form. I fondly recall afternoons spent watching her and her friends, their skilled hands weaving threads to create beautiful embroideries and delicate crochet work. These were not mere pastimes, but acts of charity, as their sales became tangible aid for older people in the local home. This dedication to the welfare of others was instilled in me, teaching me the incalculable value of community contribution. Through the sculpture, I seek to capture the vibrancy of her
communal spirit with details that recall the textures of her handiwork and the warmth of her generosity.

The sculpture's design, conceived as an altar, is a tribute to my grandmother's devout Catholic faith and her commitment to the spiritual practices that have profoundly influenced her life. Its foundation is adorned with shapes that echo the intricate patterns of the embroidery and crochet work she cherished. Simultaneously, the composition's elevation of the centerpiece creates a symbolic link between the tangible and the celestial, weaving together the creations of her hands with the convictions of her heart. In every chosen element and applied technique, I aim for this altar to embody her spirituality and her foundational role within our family and community. It stands as a tangible, enduring homage to her legacy and the spiritual mentorship she continues to bestow.

The sculpture's open wings narrate her experiences of sorrow and joy: the left wing depicts her tears at my grandfather's passing, while the right wing captures her joy upon holding a newborn grandchild. These features are pivotal, illustrating the profound influence she had on my life; she managed to navigate through grief and provide me with an idyllic childhood, enveloped in love and care.

At the altar's heart lies a golden tree, adorned with ceramic pieces that chronicle photos from Isabel's life in chronological order (Image 4.1), culminating in the cherished moments we shared. Golden butterflies, symbolic of my presence in her life, are interwoven among the branches, highlighting my integral role. This centerpiece not only celebrates her journey but also reflects the continuous impact she has on my life, embodying the intertwining of our spirits.
Image 3. Close-up of Isabel.
My mother, who remains in Colombia, is another beacon of influence and inspiration within this thesis. Her presence in my life is akin to a guiding star, illuminating the path of genuine affection and sacrifice. Through her, I have come to understand and appreciate a form of love that is profoundly rich and often elusive, particularly from the perspective of a man: genuine, transparent, and steadfast true love. There’s a saying that only a mother’s love is pure enough to burn bright without ever casting a shadow. In my life’s story, my mother embodies this adage. She is the one person whose love is so boundless that I have no doubt she would lay down her life for me without hesitation. Her love has been my fortress and sanctuary, and I am eternally indebted for her unwavering loyalty and unconditional love. I carry joyfully a debt of gratitude, aiming to reflect her teachings in my actions and extend the care she has lavished upon me to others in my life.

Reflecting upon the love and care I received from my mother, my most poignant recollections converge upon her protectiveness. Although overprotectiveness is often cast in a less favorable light, for me, it was the soil from which my trust in her grew. Her enveloping care may have seemed to others like a shield too impermeable, a barrier against the very act of growing up. But to me, it was her way of saying, “No matter what, you’re safe with me.” This maternal overprotectiveness, a constant theme in my upbringing, expresses itself in my art. The sculpture I’ve created in her honor holds within it the complexities of her guardianship, symbolized through a cage wrought with arabesques and organic shapes. This cage is not a prison but a lattice of love, mirroring the ornate and protective grilles that grace Colombian homes. These architectural features, a nod to the rich colonial heritage of Latin America, serve as a visual metaphor for the nurturing environment my mother created for me—a space where I was treasured and guarded.
The sculpture’s centerpiece, a lustrous golden tree cradled within the protective cage, represents myself, seen through my mother’s eyes. This tree is no ordinary plant; it is the
culmination of her care, a testament to her dedication. It stands as a golden tree, representing maturity, strength, and beauty from being tended with love. It’s an emblem of pride for my mother, a symbol of the growth that can occur under the right conditions. The tree also intimately connects to our homeland’s literature, specifically to Gabriel García Márquez’s magical realism. The golden butterflies that spring from the branches are not just a nod to the literary genius of my country but serve as a personal metaphor for transformation and freedom. These golden butterflies, taking flight from the protective tree, are emblematic of my journey from youth’s sheltered innocence to adulthood’s autonomy. They represent the moment when I stretched my wings beyond the loving constraints of my maternal cage, carrying with me the values and lessons that such love imparted.

*Gissela* (Image 5), a heartfelt dedication to my aunt, encapsulates the profound impact she has had on my life. Growing up in a small Colombian town, her wisdom and spirit were the guiding forces that opened my eyes to the vastness of the world beyond my immediate surroundings. The core of this artwork is the thoughtful use of books, a symbolic representation of the pivotal role education and knowledge have played in my life, thanks to her influence. Each book in this sculpture is more than just a collection of pages; it’s a testament to the habit of exploration, learning, and understanding the deeper meanings of life that she nurtured in me.

At the heart of the piece stands a tower, skillfully crafted from these books and materials, representing my aunt’s enduring presence in my life. This tower, rising from the central book titled “Familia”, signifies not just the growth and stability she brought into my life, but also the strength and support that come from family ties. The sculpture’s design mirrors the values she embodies – bonding, support, family, and care highlight the importance of a strong family bond. Each ‘chapter’ of the sculpture, signifying different books, is imbued with personal significance.
They reflect the diverse lessons and values she imparted – from the importance of hard work and determination to the joy of creativity and the pursuit of dreams. My aunt’s influence is the thread that weaves through each element of this artwork, binding it into a coherent narrative of mentorship, love, and inspiration.

Image 5. Gissela, 2024, Mixed media, 36” x 36” x 75”
The Creative Process of the Sculptures

I must be candid in acknowledging that the creative process behind my sculptures took some time to gestate and evolve. It could be said that their inception can be traced back to my first foray into three-dimensional art during my master’s degree program when I created my narrative piece featuring Policarpa Salavarrieta, a work that now stands as a part of this very exhibition. The concept of depth and perspective has always intrigued me in art, and I thoroughly explored these elements in that initial project. Subsequently, I felt compelled to embark on a larger-scale artistic endeavor, retaining the notion of utilizing depth through diverse layers. This led me to experiment with abstract sculptures crafted from MDF (Medium-Density Fiberboard) and paint.

The genesis of these sculptures, as previously mentioned in earlier sections, stemmed from my family serving as the wellspring of inspiration. In this artistic endeavor, I delved deep into my memories, mining them for the rich reservoir of emotions, recollections, and narratives that I could distill into abstract and predominantly conceptual forms. For instance, when shaping my grandmother’s sculpture, I drew upon the profound influence of the Catholic faith—an enduring facet of her life. Her unwavering commitment to this faith has not only been a source of personal strength but also a conduit through which she imparts wisdom and values. My mother’s sculpture took the form of a cage, a symbol representing her steadfast protection, a form of love that I’ve always regarded as profoundly positive despite any critiques it may have garnered. Through her protective instincts, she masterfully conveyed the depth of her affection and demonstrated her readiness to make sacrifices for my well-being. Lastly, I rendered my aunt as a towering stack of books, symbolizing her role as an endless reservoir of knowledge and personal growth.
The initial phases of crafting these sculptures, like most creative ventures, invariably commenced with sketches. These sketches weren’t merely outlines of the concepts but also comprehensive renderings delineating the shapes, dimensions, and intricacies of the sculptures. Subsequently, I translated these meticulously developed ideas into vector format—a transition that endowed me with a heightened clarity regarding how these abstract concepts could be effectively translated into tangible, two-dimensional plans. A pivotal aspect of my artistic growth in this process was the integration of these ideas from the realm of paper and digital design into the realm of physicality. The vector designs facilitated the production of the sculptures using laser cutting and CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machining. This transition into machining and fabrication techniques was a significant milestone in my creative journey, as it expanded my horizons and versatility in working with various tools and methods.

The most arduous and time-consuming facet of my creative process centered on bestowing these sculptures with the immaculate and pristine finish that I had envisioned. This aspect was intrinsically tied to my overarching theme of purity and sanctity, which I endeavored to maintain consistently throughout all the pieces. It was through this meticulous attention to detail that I sought to endow these sculptures with an aura of grandeur and flawlessness, making them appear imposing and perfect. The choice of MDF, while offering certain advantages, also presented challenges due to its inherent imperfections. Achieving the desired finish demanded numerous cycles of painstaking work, including filling, sanding, and priming, before the surfaces were finally ready to receive coats of pristine white paint. Once the base layers of paint were applied, the process advanced to the intricate assembly phase. This stage, however, came with its own set of challenges, as some pieces did not fit together seamlessly. It necessitated meticulous adjustments and, in some instances, the complete recreation of certain components. These
challenges were primarily attributed to my relatively limited experience with the specific materials and processes involved. Finally, after all elements were successfully assembled, I proceeded to embellish the sculptures with various details that reinforced their thematic essence. These included the application of gold accents, the incorporation of elements such as golden butterflies, the inclusion of family photographs, and the creation of illustrated portraits.

In retrospect, this creative journey has allowed me to explore a wide array of techniques and tools, from the inception of concepts on paper to the realization of physical sculptures through laser cutting and CNC machining. This endeavor has significantly enriched my artistic experience, enabling me to breathe life into my abstract and conceptual visions, transforming them into tangible, artistic expressions that communicate a profound thematic depth.
Project Influences

Louise Nevelson, a tridimensional muse

As I immersed myself in the creation of my sculpture series, the artistic legacy of Louise Nevelson plays a pivotal role, shaping both the conceptual underpinnings and the aesthetic execution of my work. Nevelson, celebrated for her grand, monochromatic assemblages, has profoundly influenced how I conceive and visualize my tribute to Colombian women.

The layered narratives inherent in Nevelson’s assemblage technique (Image 6), where she skillfully combined found objects into cohesive and meaningful artworks, are reflected in my own sculptures. Each piece I create is a tapestry of stories, attributes, and experiences drawn from the lives of the Colombian women I wish to honor. This approach, akin to Nevelson’s complex assembly of varied elements, allows me to craft narratives that are rich in depth and meaning, yet abstract in their representation. The abstract nature of Nevelson’s work, which invites personal interpretation and connection, guides my sculptural forms. They are not direct representations but abstract embodiments, offering space for viewers to engage and find personal resonance with the essence and spirit of the subjects depicted.

Aesthetically, Nevelson’s iconic monochromatic color schemes, especially her use of black, inspire my own approach to color. By employing a similar monochromatic palette, I aim to bring unity and focus to the diverse facets of womanhood encapsulated in my sculptures. This choice highlights the interplay of form and shadow, creating a visual drama reminiscent of Nevelson’s striking compositions. Furthermore, Nevelson’s preference for wood, often repurposed, resonates with my material choices, steering me towards substances that embody cultural significance and a tangible connection to the Colombian environment and heritage.

My sculptures, much like Nevelson’s works, are not just artistic creations but narratives of resilience and innovation. They reflect the strength and ingenuity of Colombian women, echoing Nevelson’s tenacity in a male-dominated art world. Each sculpture is a story in itself, a narrative of a woman’s life, her impact, and her legacy. This form of sculptural storytelling, initiated by Nevelson’s pioneering work, establishes a dialogue between my artistic expression and the subjects I portray.
In summary, Louise Nevelson’s approach to art profoundly informs and enriches my sculptural journey. Her bold manipulation of form, her innovative technique of assemblage, and her knack for creating powerful narratives through abstract shapes significantly guide my creative process. In this endeavor, Nevelson’s influence is more than a mere element in my artistic practice; it serves as a bridge linking the rich cultural heritage of Colombia with a broader narrative of women’s strength and creative power in the realm of art.
Digital Illustration Portraiture

In the realm of modern artistic expression, digital illustration emerges as a profound medium, a crucible where art and technology amalgamate to create impactful narratives. This chapter explores the significance of digital illustration—not only as a medium of artistic practice but as a powerful tool for communication and storytelling.

Digital illustration transcends traditional boundaries, offering a canvas where vivid imagery can be conjured with the precision and flexibility that digital tools provide. It is an art form that resonates with the contemporary audience, capable of conveying complex ideas and emotions through a blend of visual elements (Yanqi Wang, 2022). In this thesis, each digital illustration is meticulously crafted to portray significant Colombian women who have immensely contributed to women’s empowerment and society. These illustrations are not merely visual compositions; they are narratives that encapsulate the essence of these influential figures.

Accompanying each illustration is a biographical description, which serves to highlight the historical and cultural importance of these women in Colombia. These narratives delve into their achievements, struggles, and the indelible marks they have left on society. Simultaneously, they offer a personal perspective, elucidating how each figure resonates with me as an individual and connects with the inspiring women in my own family.

In this series, the stylistic essence is meticulously crafted, drawing from a diverse array of artistic influences to create a unique digital illustration style that is both stylized and pristine, with a distinct emphasis on geometric forms. This approach to digital artistry is not just about visual appeal; it is a conscious effort to blend the historical with the contemporary, the traditional with the modern.
The influence of A.M. Cassandre is evident in the use of clean lines and bold forms, which bring a sense of clarity and strength to each illustration. Cassandre’s work, known for its revolutionary impact on graphic design, particularly in the realm of poster art, offers a foundation of simplicity and power that is fundamental to this series.

The elegance and sophistication of Tamara de Lempicka’s art deco style are also a significant influence. Lempicka’s art is renowned for its sleek, streamlined aesthetic, characterized by intense color and bold, sensuous forms. This influence brings an air of refined grace and a timeless quality to the illustrations, merging the allure of the past with the vibrancy of the present.

Additionally, the contemporary vibrance of Colombian illustrators like Edgar Rozo injects a modern and culturally rich dimension into the work. Their vibrant and dynamic illustrations, often reflecting the complexity and diversity of Colombian culture, provide a lively and colorful backdrop that informs the thematic and stylistic aspects of the series.
Maria Picassó I Piquer’s influence is also integral, particularly in the use of whimsical and geometric interpretations. Her style, characterized by playful yet structured forms, adds an element of imaginative exploration to the series. This approach allows each illustration to not only depict its subject but also to tell a story, engaging the viewer in a visual narrative that is both captivating and thought-provoking.

Collectively, these influences culminate in a digital illustration style that is rich in history yet distinctly modern. Each illustration becomes a canvas where the past and present, tradition and innovation, blend seamlessly, creating images that are not only visually striking but also deeply evocative of the stories and personalities they represent. This series, therefore, is more
than just a collection of portraits; it is a celebration of artistic diversity and a tribute to the enduring spirit of Colombian women.

These illustrations are a journey through a gallery of digital tributes—each piece a celebration of a remarkable Colombian woman, rendered in a style that is both a homage to past artistic masters and a reflection of contemporary digital artistry. It is a fusion of history, culture, personal narrative, and artistic innovation, showcasing how digital illustration can bridge the past with the present, and personal stories with universal themes.

Building upon this foundation, the project finds a kindred spirit in “Colombiennes” by Jade Vergnes and Hortense Jauffret. Their work adds a profound layer of context and resonance to my digital illustration series. “Colombiennes” is a remarkable project that showcases 20 portraits of inspiring Colombian women, weaving together their stories through a combination of written testimonies, photographs, and illustrations. This work aligns seamlessly with the thematic core of my own project, which also seeks to honor and celebrate the contributions of Colombian women through digital art.

The “Colombiennes” project stands as a testament to the power of visual storytelling in highlighting the roles and achievements of women in Colombian society. It captures the essence of these women not just in their accomplishments but in their struggles, hopes, and dreams. Similarly, my digital illustrations aim to portray the multifaceted nature of Colombian women, drawing from personal and cultural narratives to create a rich tapestry of representation.

Moreover, the artistic approach of Vergne and Jauffret in “Colombiennes” serves as an inspiration for my own work. Their ability to capture the spirit and resilience of their subjects through a combination of mediums resonates with my own stylistic journey. It reinforces the
importance of digital illustration as a versatile and powerful medium for capturing the depth and complexity of human stories.

In essence, “Colombiennes” not only complements the conceptual framework of my project but also provides a benchmark of artistic excellence and cultural relevance. It exemplifies the capacity of art to transcend mere representation, becoming a conduit for deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences of women in Colombia. This alignment enriches my own artistic endeavor, underscoring the shared goal of celebrating and honoring the indomitable spirit of Colombian women.
Who are the women portrayed?

María Cano, a significant figure in Colombian history, is celebrated for her groundbreaking role as a female political leader and social activist. Born in Medellín, Colombia, in 1887, Cano was instrumental in the early 20th century, when women's political participation was extremely limited, not just in Colombia but worldwide. She co-founded the Socialist Revolutionary Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionario, PSR) and was a key figure in the labor movement, advocating for workers' rights, social justice, and gender equality. Her involvement in strikes and her eloquent speeches earned her the affectionate nickname "Flower of Labor."

Cano's activism had its challenges. She operated in a period of intense political and social turmoil in Colombia, characterized by profound inequalities, restricted rights for workers, and a conservative society that often saw women's roles as confined to the domestic sphere. Despite these obstacles, Cano's leadership and advocacy helped to lay the groundwork for future social reforms and the advancement of women's rights in Colombia. Her legacy continues to inspire new generations of activists and is a testament to her conviction and dedication to change.

My fascination with María Cano arises from her courage and firmness in advocating for the rights of workers and women in an era where women rarely assumed such positions. In a male-dominated context, she emerged as a powerful and disruptive voice, challenging gender norms and fighting for a more equitable society. Her dedication to labor activism and her participation in the founding of the Revolutionary Socialist Party are testaments to her tireless efforts to bring social and economic justice to the most disadvantaged classes.
The inclusion of María Cano in my illustrations is a tribute to her legacy, which not only paved the way for future generations of women in politics and activism but also significantly contributed to the fight for equality in Colombia. Her life and work are inspiring examples of how conviction and courage can bring about positive changes, even in the most challenging circumstances. Cano not only fought for labor rights but also promoted the education and empowerment of women, playing a crucial role in transforming the political and social landscape of Colombia.

Her story is a personal source of inspiration for me, reflecting the values of strength, resilience, and dedication that characterize Colombian women. In illustrating her figure, I seek to
capture not only her image but also the essence of her revolutionary spirit, her commitment to social justice, and her enduring influence in the history of Colombia. María Cano is not just a historical figure; she is a symbol of the constant struggle for equity and justice, and a powerful reminder that conviction and passion can drive significant changes in society.

Mother Laura Montoya and Gertrudis Caycedo are pivotal figures in my illustrations, reflecting the profound impact of faith as a tool for community service and education, much like the influence seen in the life of my grandmother. These two women, revered for their dedication to faith and community, resonate deeply with the spirit and actions of my grandmother, whose small group of ladies used their faith and talents in crochet to support charitable causes.

Mother Laura Montoya, born in 1874 in Jericó, Colombia, is a celebrated figure in Colombian and Catholic Church history for her pioneering missionary and educational work. As the founder of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and Saint Catherine of Siena, she was the first Colombian to establish a religious congregation, dedicating her life to serving marginalized and indigenous communities. Venturing into Colombia's remote areas, she provided education and spiritual guidance while respecting and valuing indigenous cultures, an approach that was revolutionary at the time. Canonized by Pope Francis in 2013, Mother Laura became the first Colombian saint, recognized for her compassionate service and advocacy for social justice and indigenous rights. Her work, emphasizing the power of faith as a force for societal change, mirrors the way my grandmother used her faith to positively impact her community, highlighting the timeless nature and profound impact of faith-driven service.
Gertrudis Caycedo, a lesser-known yet impactful figure born in 1885, embodies the essence of community service rooted in faith. Her unwavering commitment to aiding those in need, guided by her spiritual convictions, showcases the dynamic way in which faith can transcend personal belief to manifest as actionable service. Her initiatives in community-building and extending support to the less fortunate underscore the pivotal role of faith in fostering unity and imbuing a collective sense of purpose. Caycedo’s life, reflecting a time of burgeoning social change in the early 20th century, aligns closely with my grandmother's endeavors. Both women harnessed the power of their faith to serve others and make tangible differences in their communities, illustrating the enduring influence of faith-based service.
The parallel between these historical figures and my grandmother is striking. My grandmother, leading a group of elderly ladies, channeled her faith into community service. Their gatherings to pray the rosary were not just spiritual meetings but also sessions of creativity and charity, as they crafted crochet pieces. These items, later sold or raffled, became a source of funds for charitable causes. This act of using their skills and faith to give back to the community is a reflection of how Mother Laura Montoya and Gertrudis Caycedo utilized their belief as a catalyst for community service and education.

In each of these women, faith was not a passive attribute but a dynamic force for good. It drove them to educate, to serve, and to unify their communities. The way they transformed their belief into action has been a significant source of inspiration in my life and work, mirroring the...
values and actions of my grandmother. Through my illustrations, I aim to capture the essence of their spirit – their commitment, their compassion, and their unyielding dedication to using faith as a tool for positive change. Just like Mother Laura Montoya and Gertrudis Caycedo, my grandmother's life demonstrates how faith can be a powerful motivator for community service, transforming personal beliefs into actions that benefit the wider community.

Teresita Gómez, born in the mid-20th century and celebrated as a distinguished Colombian pianist, shares a profound bond with my path as a graphic designer and illustrator through the core of artistic expression and communication. This connection is vividly illustrated in my work, where parallels between Teresita's musical expressions and my visual artistry highlight the versatility of art as a conduit for ideas and emotions. Just as Teresita Gómez weaves complex emotional narratives through her piano performances, I aim to capture and communicate similar depths of feeling and thought in my illustrations. Both forms of art, though different in medium, are united in their purpose: to evoke and communicate, bridging gaps between the artist and the audience with universal languages of music and visual imagery.
Teresita Gómez is celebrated for her extraordinary talent and emotional depth in piano performances. Her ability to capture and convey complex emotions through music exemplifies how art can transcend mere entertainment to become a profound means of communication. Gómez’s dedication to her craft, her masterful execution, and her deep connection with her audience highlight the transformative power of art in its ability to resonate emotionally and culturally with people.
My path as a graphic designer and illustrator mirrors the essence of what Teresita Gómez represents in music. Just as she uses her piano to express and evoke emotions, I employ visual art to communicate and articulate ideas. My work in graphic design and illustration is not just about aesthetics; it’s a language in itself, conveying messages, telling stories, and connecting with audiences on multiple levels. The creative process, from concept to execution, is an exploration of themes and narratives, similar to how a musician composes and performs a piece of music.

The correlation between Teresita Gómez's musical artistry and my visual artistry lies in our shared understanding of art as a universal language. Whether it’s the melodious notes emanating from Teresita’s piano or the visual narratives I create, both forms of art transcend verbal language and cultural barriers. They communicate in ways that words often cannot, evoking feelings, thoughts, and reactions that are deeply personal yet universally understood.

Shakira's early career in Colombia, marked by challenges and humble origins, resonates deeply with me. Observing her relentless pursuit of her dreams despite numerous obstacles has been a beacon of hope and motivation. Her story exemplifies that success is not just about talent but also about determination, hard work, and the courage to persist against the odds. This has encouraged me to face my own challenges with resilience and to stay committed to my goals, regardless of the initial hardships.

Shakira’s evolution as an artist, from a local Colombian singer to an international pop sensation, has been particularly inspiring. Her ability to innovate, adapt, and grow in the ever-changing music industry mirrors the journey many of us undertake in our personal and professional lives. Her constant reinvention and success in various cultural contexts have taught me the value of adaptability and continuous learning in achieving long-term success.
Shakira’s tireless work ethic and unyielding passion for her craft have had a significant influence on my approach to life and work. Observing her dedication to honing her skills and her commitment to excellence has motivated me to pursue my passions with similar fervor and to never settle for mediocrity. Her journey underscores the belief that with enough effort and enthusiasm, one can excel in their chosen field.
As a fellow Colombian, Shakira’s success on the global stage has instilled a sense of pride and a strong connection to my cultural roots. Her ability to showcase Colombian culture to the world has been uplifting and affirming. Furthermore, her philanthropic efforts, especially in education, have highlighted the importance of giving back to the community, inspiring me to also find ways to make a positive impact in my surroundings.

In essence, Shakira’s life story is more than just a tale of musical achievement; it is a narrative filled with lessons on resilience, dedication, and the pursuit of dreams. Her journey has been a powerful catalyst in my life, driving me to embrace challenges, remain true to my passions, and strive for excellence in all my endeavors. Shakira stands as a living example of how ambition, coupled with hard work and a commitment to one’s roots, can lead to extraordinary success and a meaningful legacy.

Adriana Ocampo, born in the late 20th century and celebrated for her groundbreaking work as a planetary geologist, alongside my aunt, a former hiring manager at a major Colombian bank, both embody the principle that professional roles can serve a broader societal good, going beyond individual accomplishment. Ocampo's work in space science has significantly impacted not just the field of planetary geology but also the realms of education and public inspiration. Her commitment to uncovering the mysteries of our solar system is not merely a personal victory but a conduit for enhancing collective understanding and motivating the next generation of scientists. This narrative mirrors the ethos behind my aunt's career, where her position in the banking sector was utilized not just for corporate success but for fostering opportunities and growth. Both figures demonstrate that professional achievements can be harnessed to benefit society, inspiring others to look beyond their personal aspirations towards a greater communal impact.
Similarly, my aunt utilized her role in the banking sector to support and nurture her employees, focusing on their professional development. More significantly, she used her position to aid marginalized communities, organizing events and initiatives that directed resources and attention towards those in need. Her efforts demonstrate how corporate roles can be impactful in fostering social change and community development.

Both these women illustrate that professional success achieves its fullest potential when it serves a broader purpose. Their careers inspire a commitment to use one’s skills and influence
not solely for personal advancement but for the greater good, creating a lasting positive impact on society and individuals alike.

Each of these stories, while distinct in their settings and achievements, shares a common theme of utilizing personal success for broader societal impact. Whether it’s through sports, music, science, or corporate leadership, these individuals exemplify how talent, dedication, and a commitment to the greater good can create a lasting legacy that transcends their fields. Their journeys remind us that our achievements can be a powerful tool for positive change, inspiring us to think beyond our personal goals and consider our potential impact on the world around us.
Conclusion

In wrapping up this journey, the "Mujeres Cheveres" project has been a deeply personal odyssey, a mirror reflecting my growth as a human being through the lens of the remarkable women who've sculpted my life's narrative. By weaving abstract sculptures and digital illustrations into a tapestry of artistic endeavor, this work transcends the boundaries of mere creativity. It becomes a beacon, illuminating the stories of resilience, dedication, and strength that define the women who've left an indelible mark on my existence and the fabric of Colombian society at large.

Each piece in this collection is more than just an artistic expression; it's a heartfelt homage to the women in my family—my grandmother, aunt, and mother—whose stories are interwoven with the collective essence of Colombian women. These figures, emblematic of the resilience and spirit that have shaped our nation's history and cultural identity, are the true muses behind my work.

"Mujeres Cheveres" aims to be more than just an exhibition; it seeks to spark a dialogue, inviting viewers to reflect on the invaluable contributions of women to our society. It encourages an appreciation for the women in our lives, who, with unwavering dedication, enrich our days and inspire us to envision a brighter, more equitable tomorrow. This project is my ode to them, a celebration of their enduring legacy and the infinite ways they make every day better.
Bibliography


Vita

Hernán is a Colombian graphic designer and digital illustrator interested in the integration of cultural heritage into modern design practices. With a profound love for digital illustration, Hernán skillfully incorporates illustrative elements into his projects, enhancing storytelling and visual impact. His work is deeply influenced by his Colombian roots and the values instilled by his family, which manifest in the integrity, dedication, and creativity evident in his professional output.

Passionate about exploring new mediums, Hernán continuously seeks innovative ways to enrich his creative practice and journey. His interest in architecture significantly shapes his work, as he endeavors to bring a sense of tridimensionality and depth to his designs. This approach not only sets Hernán apart in the field of graphic design but also showcases his commitment to pushing the boundaries of traditional digital illustration. Through his exploration of various mediums and his ability to blend cultural influences with contemporary techniques, Hernán creates unique visuals that captivate and engage audiences worldwide.