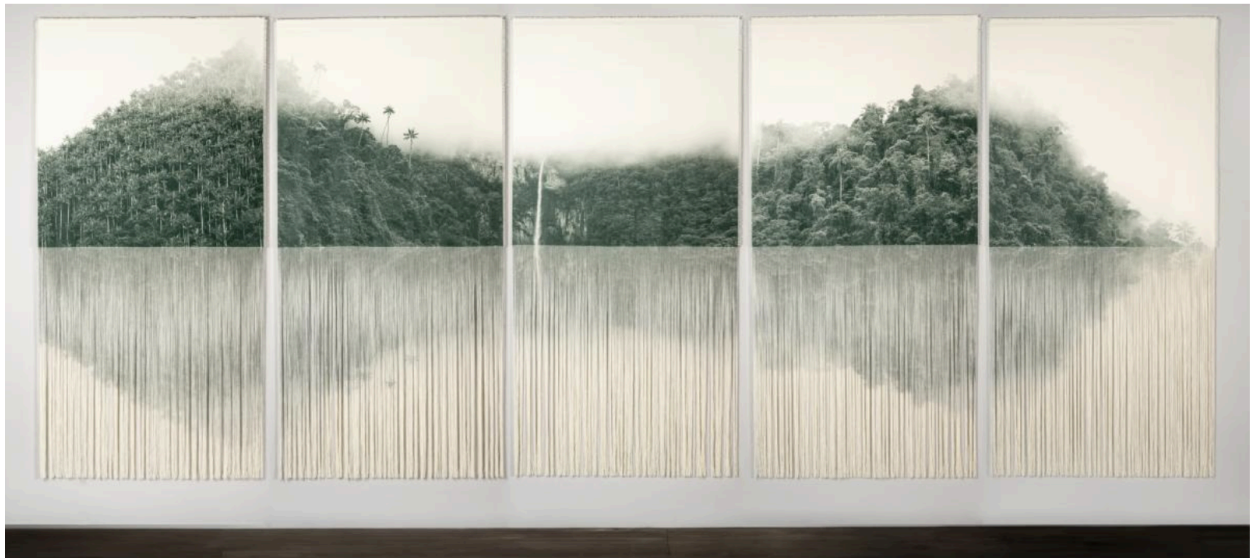


Interview

## 'Bruma', Ana González's first solo exhibition in New York

On January 9th, there was the opening at the Sean Kelly Gallery. Interview.



'Quimbaya' is a five-part work in which the overflowing artist appeals to the devastation of the country's cloud forests. Photo: Photo: Courtesy of Ana González and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York. Los Angeles.



**Natalia Tamayo Gaviria** ✉

Journalist

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When Ana González Rojas opened her exhibition *Llovizna* in Bogotá, in the capital and the department of Cundinamarca, forest fires were in the news. It was September 18, 2024. At the same time, Bogotá had been rationing water for months due to the lack of rain and the dry season, which created a crisis in the Chingaza system reservoirs that supply the city.

On January 9, when she presented *Bruma*, her first solo exhibition in New York and a follow-up to *Llovizna*, the United States was closely following the events in Los Angeles, which was being devoured by flames. Entire neighborhoods were reduced to mere ashes. Once again, drought, lack of rain and global warming were determining factors in the Californian capital experiencing fires unprecedented in its recent history. And, four days after opening his exhibition at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, a fire was reported in Chingaza Park, in the Fómeque sector.

**Nature, which González has taken pains to portray and recreate artistically, is haphazard.**

**“I didn’t plan it that way.”** However, events gave – and continue to give – greater relevance to the message that the Bogotá artist wanted to convey with these two exhibitions, in which water is an implicit and explicit protagonist.

Mist, which is a type of fog, is an atmospheric phenomenon in which tiny particles of water are retained, which favors the existence of cloud forests. **This ecosystem plays a role in the water cycle** that reaches rivers, streams and ravines. It looks like a white cloud that disperses and covers everything in sight.

Cloud forests are also a reservoir of biodiversity and life. And today they are threatened by deforestation and resource extraction. **The duality in which these territories exist in the country is the subject of González Rojas' artistic gaze in *Bruma***, her latest exhibition at the Sean Kelly Gallery, which announced that it will represent the Colombian artist in the U.S.

“*Bruma* is a work conceived of in terms of fog, in terms of its importance in the cycle of rain and water. It is an exhibition based on Humboldt’s phrase that said that **nature is like a large textile, that if you pull on a thread of the fabric, something will happen to that textile.** That is how I do it: with each small act we are destroying a little of that large textile that is nature,” says the Bogotá artist about her work in an interview with EL TIEMPO.

In her work, the techniques of graphite and acrylic on canvas, porcelain and textile sublimation converge. This last element is very present in all her work and in *Bruma* it takes on a more palpable meaning due to that phrase by the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt that inspired her work. It is a conversation between embroidery and overflow, between construction and deconstruction, between existence and devastation.

Most of *Bruma* 's works have Muisca terms that name the places represented, while also carrying a special meaning that they have about nature. "The names are not just names, but a description of water, of the mountain." The forms of nature present in the cloud forests; the elements of contemplation that González seeks to perpetuate; the landscapes that need to be protected so as not to break the natural cycles.

### **How did this concern for nature and its representation come about?**

As an artist, one goes through different stages and interests, otherwise art becomes monotonous and boring. My body of work began with a concern for human and social displacement. And when I visited those places where the displaced came from, I found abandoned places that had life cycles like nature itself. Like when there is a crack or a ruin and nature grows. It was the dematerialization of architecture and the materialization of nature. For me, it was important to understand it because those cycles are a continuous rebirth. I did not want to stay only in the crack left by violence and leading people to move. I wanted to understand the message of nature itself in relation to rebirth and reinvention. I began to delve into Colombia and with the book *Daughters of Water* I became fascinated with knowing that country that people do not know about. The hidden and geographically secret Colombia. There my work approached the subject of nature.

### **Her initial training was in architecture. And what she says about the 'dematerialization of architecture and the materialization of nature' is interesting. How can we understand this materialization of nature when we a priori imagine construction objects as materials?**

I will always be an architect. It is the first thing I studied, and it is my passion and my origin. Art is my secondary education. Architecture gave me a great foundation to understand the environment, not only to understand the environment in which we live, but our relationship with nature and the 'wall' that separates us from nature. My work tries to recreate the environment in which we live, in tropical countries like ours, from an architectural perspective. My works are almost like stage sets. I create constructions of fictitious landscapes that do not exist. For example, I take 2,000 photographs on a trip and there are works of a landscape that are made up of five or more large-format photographs. They are not necessarily sequential, but rather it is a landscape reinvented to evoke a sensation, a new idea of landscape, a construction. With this I make visible landscapes that have been silenced by the exploitation of resources, ecosystems that are being lost, while materializing the sensation of the cloud forest and other ecosystems that still exist, that are at risk and that we can protect.

**What connection does this exhibition have with *Llovizna* ?**

*Bruma* is based on my imagination of the cloud forest, which seems absolutely magical to me and not many people have the experience of living in a cloud forest. *Bruma* is a mirror of those places that are very fragile and speak of water, rain, which is what mist is. This exhibition is the continuation of *Llovizna* , which is still in Bogotá. It is an artistic process that has water as its theme.

**What were your expeditions through the cloud forests like? Who accompanied you?**

I have always been fascinated by botanical expeditions and the explorers of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Humboldt, who documented the Andes. I wanted to explore that with my own eyes. The explorers shared their masculine view of the landscape with us, and I wanted to contribute my feminine vision. I was accompanied by ornithologists, biologists, agronomists, farmers, botanists, people who know the place and local people. I was also accompanied by people like the anthropologist Wade Davis, who has an outside view and speaks in a very poetic way about Colombia. With him I was able to understand how Colombia, its forests, its jungles, and the Andes were seen. That a river is a tributary that connects various communities, which speak in a very different way about nature. For example, the Muisca culture recognizes water as a magical being. For them, lagoons and waterfalls are a boundary between the real and the sacred, which is why they made offerings to it. There is a very beautiful story that speaks of the mother lake and the father mountain who have a son river, who goes to the sea, becomes a cloud and returns to the mountain, to the moor and becomes drizzle and so on. The vital cycles have been understood for years by the communities, and now we are breaking them with deforestation and other practices.

**You said that your interest was to replicate the journeys of explorers like Humboldt, but from a female perspective. In addition to the difference in the periods in which they made their expeditions and yours, what other differential elements do you highlight from that female perspective?**

Even though there is a great relationship in terms of admiration and devotion for nature and the natural -of course, from different knowledge-, there is a different vision, because we are talking about explorers who saw territories to conquer, who described nature, like rubber and cinchona, and classified it. In other words, they were objectifying nature. The vision that I contribute is a more intuitive one, which speaks of protection and not exploitation and classification. And that is the vision that indigenous communities have, which do not see nature as an object to name, because by naming it you distance yourself from the object. The Koguis, for example, have taught me that we are nature. It is not nature and the self, but that we are all nature. That vision is more powerful, because it invites us to relate from the natural, from instinct, from the fertile, from protection. It is not at all rational. And the communities have not lost that feminine vision, which lends itself as a hopeful look. My works are feminine landscapes because they show what still remains and needs to be cared for and protected.

**Textiles are present in the phrase by Humboldt that you quote and in your techniques.**

**What does this material mean to you?**

Textiles have been a fundamental part of my work since 2007, when I started making *Devastations*. I have always had this interest in working with textiles since I was little. My grandmother embroidered and she taught me how to do it when I was little. She was a great embroiderer and I connected a lot with her in that regard. She told me that you always have to embroider perfectly on the front and back of a garment, even though I was the only one who saw it. That stayed with me and at university I saw a little about the textile world and, later, when I studied in Ireland. When I returned to Colombia, I became aware of the importance of textiles in our country, that we are a textile country. Textiles have always been present in our communities. For example, there are the textiles of the Guanes of Santander, of the Koguis and the Arawaks. Women weave their thoughts into backpacks for men and with codifications of lineage. Aesthetically, textiles are a *statement*. My work now is not based on a textile made on a loom, but it does focus on the theme of embroidering and overflowing, of the perfect and imperfect, of constructing and deconstructing to show a reality.

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Ana Gonzalez Rojas, Colombian artist.

**There is a great deal of recognition worldwide for indigenous communities such as the Incas and the Mayans, but not so much for the Muiscas, which is the community that stands out in *Bruma*. What does this indigenous community teach us about the protection of nature?**

They have a message that is still relevant: respect for nature, building not from ego so that a civilization endures. In other words, ephemeral architecture that leaves no trace. This is one of the great legacies left by the civilizations that have inhabited Colombia: a trace that is almost unrecognizable. For example, Ciudad Perdida is lost. The malocas, which are a symbol of respect for nature, do not last more than 100 years. The communities continue their heritage through their languages and their trades.

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