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Nomad School

Laura Penelope Baquero

The University of Montana

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NOMAD SCHOOL

By

Laura Maria Penelope Baquero

Finance and International Relations, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia, 1997

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Approved by:

Dr. David A. Strobel, Dean
Graduate School

Dr. James Kriley
Drama Dance Department

Dr. Randy Bolton
Drama Dance Department
A Journey of Self Transformation

Dr. James Kriley

Dr. Randy Bolton

As a result of social and family expectations I was pushed to pursue a lifestyle where my passion and talent for the Arts did not have a place. Nomad School is a personal and artistic research project in which I took a life changing experience of living in a nomad community, to develop a body of work that would tell the story of my personal transformation into the artist that I always wanted to be. I used journals and sketchbooks as my primary personal research tools and read through all my notes from six years of traveling back and forth between South America (I am originally from Colombia) and the United States, looking for hints of moments of discovery and breakthroughs. I produced ten pen and ink drawings and four poems which were displayed in a multimedia show that also included a storytelling performance and a series of short slide shows in Missoula, Montana. The creation of Nomad School was the critical moment for me to begin identifying myself as a multimedia artist.
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Introduction

La Caravana Arcoiris por la Paz, the Rainbow Peace Caravan, is a nomad art and ecological education project, formed of volunteers from all over the world. It has visited seventeen countries of the Americas, since its departure from Mexico in 1996, and its purpose is to visit urban and rural communities, sharing a message of peace and love for the Earth. Using street theatre, workshops, lectures, and a living example of a sustainable community lifestyle, they interact with grassroots organizations of women, farmers, indigenous peoples, artists, ecologists, as well as schools, universities, local and national governments and the mass media. It finances itself with its artistic and educational activities, and it is governed by a non-hierarchical decision making body that includes all of its members.

In 1998, the Caravan had gone through Colombia, my country of birth and residence at the time and was headed south, via Venezuela, into the Amazon region of Brazil. I recently graduated from the School of Finance and International Relations at the Universidad Externado de Colombia, but I was mostly inspired by the idea of travelling to places remote from my social and cultural environment. In December of this year and with far less information than what I have given here, I decided to join the group. I saw it as a convenient way to travel as I served other people, but mostly, I joined because I saw the possibility to find my true dream of being an artist. I traveled from Bogotá to Caracas by airplane and from there, I crossed by bus some of the most remote areas of South America as I headed towards the Gran Sabana located in southeastern Venezuela, on the
ancient Guyana Shield (see appendix A). I found them camping in a beautiful place called Salto Kauai and was enchanted by an atmosphere of love, respect, openness and community. They lived as a tribe where everyone was involved in a group activity and worked in connection with the whole group. This lifestyle was completely new for me and in fulfilled me in such a way that I stayed for over a year traveling non-stop with the group. I met and married my husband there and since then, we have traveled back and forth from Missoula to the Caravan four times for periods ranging between two and nine months at a time. Since I met the Caravan in Venezuela, the nomad tribe became a central part of my life.

Restatement of the Intent of the Project

My intent with this Creative Pulse Project was to develop a multimedia exhibition entitled “Nomad School”, that would include a collection of original drawings informing different aspects of my life changing experience as a “student” of the Rainbow Peace Caravan. I also intended to include poems, photos and a storytelling performance. I wanted to tell stories in two different formats: random storytelling throughout the gallery using a “bag of stories” that contained ideas for over 50 stories about daily life events; as well as five slide shows illustrating different aspects of the Caravan’s work.

Accomplishments

I created a show named “Nomad School” which was a multimedia exhibition open to the public on the First Friday of April 2006 at Ceretana Studios, an old grain mill adapted and conserved to hold 20 artist studios and a nice gallery space, located on the West side
of Missoula, Montana. The choice of space was both convenient and serendipitous. My husband and I rent a studio there which saved me the job of applying to show at a commercial gallery, waiting for a reply and possibly being rejected. I also found affinity with the collective of resident artists who run the space whose mission is “to provide a permanent exhibition space, contributing to the creation of new works of visual arts, nurture the growth of professional artists, and contribute to the development of a vibrant arts community in Missoula”. Ceretana reminded me of the endurance of the Caravan as well as the adaptability developed by its members as they adventure on the rough roads of the Americas.

The main aspect of the show was a series of 10 pen and ink drawings on watercolor paper, inspired by my memories, travel journal entries, and sketches that I began during my journey on board the Caravan. The drawings were accompanied by four original poems, some of which were created for the exhibition and others rescued from travel journals, large prints of photos from the Caravan archives, and five slide stories which came from my own photographic work.

The show was curated in three different rooms in the building. In the first room I informed the audience about the work that the Rainbow Peace Caravan is doing in Central and South America. I used archival photos and videos as well as my written description of what I called “the curriculum” at the Nomad School (see appendix B) . In this room I wanted people to get a general idea of the scope of the work as well as to introduce the concept that the Caravan works as a school for the volunteers who join it.
The second room displayed my drawings, poems, and a few archival photos. This room contained the central aspect of the Creative Pulse project. The drawings and poems were the expression of my personal process of transformation as a student of the Nomad School, and ultimately they were the realization of my dream. There was also an altar that represented the sacredness of my journey and a mobile stage that I used to tell some of my travel stories. I told a couple of stories from my bag as the exhibition began but as more and more people showed up I focused on smaller groups and continued to tell stories in response to their interest and questions.

The third room was set as an auditorium with a screen and a slide projector. Here, I wanted people to take a journey to the reality of the Caravan’s daily life as they listened to my descriptions of places visited, events organized with host communities, and interactions between Caravan volunteers.

A rough count of 200 people participated in the event. The work was reviewed in Missoula’s leading newspaper (see appendix C).
PART I: THE CREATIVE PROCESS
2. Arrival to “a Dream”

“Aquí, mi única responsabilidad es seguir mi sueño”
Here, my only responsibility is to follow my dream
Journal entry, Manaos, Brazil, May 1999

“Los seres humanos tienen el derecho infinito de soñar y la responsabilidad ineludible de hacer sus sueños realidad”
Human beings have the infinite right to dream and the inevitable responsibility to make their dreams come true.
Journal entry, Manaos, Brazil, August 1999

From the beginning of my journey I got involved the Caravan community as an organizer working mostly in public relations, theatre and event production, acting, teaching workshops, supporting community development activities, and participating in ceremonies. In a few weeks after my arrival I learned as much as I could about the project and became a key public relations person. I was trained in the Consensus Decision-Making methodology used by the group and began to teach it in host communities. I discovered a passion to understand interactions between Caravan members and the way they influenced our work and spent much of my time discussing and creating ways to facilitate the communication between volunteers. On top of this, we all had a huge load of daily chores such as cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and washing clothes by hand to mention a few.

These responsibilities distracted me from connecting with my art. I used them as an escape from it and only participated in theatre when there was a need for me to act and
play a character. I did a few main characters in two different productions, and some technical work as well. I also participated in collective performance art creations, took a variety of workshops in dance, and theatre, and participated in countless parades as a singer and juggler.

My life was enriched with all the amazing experiences the Caravan offered me. We traveled to far away places, shared with many cultures, lived in community and used art as a tool to change ourselves and to spread a message of peace to our host communities. But after many years of traveling, I realized that I was still unable to identify myself as an artist. I became aware of the fact that I had a huge “block” of negative beliefs about myself; fears and doubts that grew inside as I went through life denying my nature, my passion; I was convinced that I did not have the tools I needed to create because I did not go to art school. I thought I was not an artist because I could not “choose” one art form. I didn’t know where to start and I filled my journals with ideas that were never completed.

The Caravan was a spiritual journey that gave me many opportunities to reconnect with my Spirit. I was transformed by ceremonies, vision quests and daily community rituals. I found teachers in people and Nature. I became a full time participant of the spiritual awakening of our collective consciousness by living a tribal lifestyle, but I still could not make art, so I realized I needed some extra help and enrolled in the Creative Pulse.

I heard about the Program through a friend who was half way through. She mentioned the rich exchange experience with other teachers as well as the possibility of exploring all art
forms doing a lot of personal research. It sounded like a great space for me to discover my art in a rich academic environment.

The Creative Pulse gave me opportunities to better understand the process of creativity in an academic way. In relating with other people who were on a similar quest, I became less self-judgmental and more interested in taking advantages of the discoveries that happen throughout the courses. I felt like I could be true to myself and I created my projects with a renewed sense of self-confidence.

I began my final project research looking at my journals for stories and as I looked through, I realized they were “spiritual journals”. I had very few entries about actual events and places, border crossings or people. Instead I had pages and pages about emotions, dreams, philosophy. I wrote my perceptions about individual and collective transformation while living a nomad lifestyle. I made new connections between Spirit, Mother Earth, the Elements and each other through ceremony, travel, camping and living with other people with a strong desire to live together and make a change in the world.

I realized that I did not have the material to accomplish my first final project proposal (see appendix D), which was to create an illustrated compilation of stories about the lessons learned by Caravan volunteers. To begin this proposal, I sent e-mails to as many volunteers as I could all over the world but I didn’t get much of a response. It became clear again that life in the Caravan is very much “in the moment” and I realized that they
were not where I was; that this project had to be about me so it was necessary to take a different approach.

3. New proposal

I developed a new intent for the project which has been stated at the beginning of this paper and began to select quotes from the journals, classifying them in a conceptual skeleton of recurrent themes that I later defined as “the Nomad School Curriculum”. At this point, I was still in “left brain mode”, creating lots of lists and organizing themes. I selected around 37 quotes that I transferred to what later turned into my sketchbook. From those quotes and my unfinished travel sketches I started a list of possible illustrations. At the moment, I did not understand the implications of a creative process and I felt stuck on making lists. I wanted to see images instead of writing lists of ideas. I did not know that I was on my way to creating something, and became quite frustrated.

I kept on looking for hints to a different way of thinking, attempting to read between my own lines, looking at my current sketches and remembering visual patterns I used in the past. In trying to understand what was blocking me, I realized that I was actually completing a cycle of growth; I was supposed to fulfil the fundamental desire that initially made me leave home and join the Caravan. It was an unexpected realization that made me use myself as the inspirational force for the work I was supposed to create. This is how I finally took a mirror and began my first piece, a self portrait called
“Pachamama” (Mother Earth in Quechua). The end of a long cycle had arrived and I was finally living my dream.


Searching for drawing ideas, I had to navigate my personal sea, a stream of consciousness writing. I searched for more clarity and outside inspiration, and I immersed myself in Joseph Campbell’s *Power of Myth* and *The Mythic Image*. His work illuminated my personal story and gave it a context in the real world where humans have been searching for their identity through the arts for thousands of years. I discovered that the choice I made to abandon the norm of my life to go after a dream made me into a “spiritual hero”, according to Campbell’s insights about “The Hero’s Adventures”.

“...the basic motif of the hero journey: leaving one condition, finding the source of life to bring you forth richer to more mature or in another condition” (Campbell. *The Power of Myth* audiotape series, tape 1).

Ancient images of sacredness, myth, sacrifice, dreamtime, guided me through the exploration of what I wanted to express through my drawings. The growth and transformation I experienced in the Caravan was mirrored by images created centuries ago. This new connection was a great source of inspiration. I began to see beyond the linguistic symbols system that ruled my creativity for years. I moved on from being a passive observer of visual works of art to seeing images as ways to communicate aspects of me that words could not express.
My husband and I discussed the imagery in my sketches and the types of symbols I used over and over and identified a Folk and Surrealist style throughout my work. I began to look at different sources of Folk Art and studied the life and work of Frida Khalo. These sources as well as the common themes I found between my drawings and ancient works of art (i.e. people intimately related to trees, iconographic symbols representing the presence of higher or mysterious forces) helped me to move away from random drawing and to develop visual ideas to tell the story of my personal transformation. I began to sketch more often, working on different kinds of compositions and practicing a drawing technique that I learned from books, and friends. Gallery visits became more insightful and I found myself spending more time observing the way art is made.

My husband who is a talented, prolific artist was my companion through the process and next to him, I had to be strong to defeat insecurity when asking for his help. I had an unconscious protective attitude towards my artistic ideas, because I was afraid they would end up buried along with many other unaccomplished creative ideas if I let him overpower them with his knowledge and sense of aesthetics. I worked through it by creating a channel of communication to let him -and myself know- when to help and when I needed to be left to make my own discoveries. I was grateful to have his expertise supporting me until the completion of the show as well as his sense of empowerment and emotional support to do my best work.
5. Impact Of The Project.

1) Impact on the Missoula community: The Nomad School Show had an audience of around two hundred people. They had the opportunity to interact in the world of the Rainbow Peace Caravan through archival photos, informational posters, poetry, drawings, storytelling and slide shows. The show provided a space of reflection about issues such as community living, caring for the Earth, transforming the world through art. The Caravan curriculum entails themes that are of global relevance, inspiring people to exchange ideas through informal conversation. Informing people about positive actions to transform the current paradigm world wide is key to affect change in the world.

2) Impact on the Caravan. The Caravan’s miraculous survival has been determined by many factors, including a continous flow of volunteers since its creation in 1996. This flow has been secured by promotional events such as video screenings, slide shows, conferences as well as web networking. The Nomad School Show is a contribution to the promotional efforts that keep the project alive. The success of the Caravan is also determined by the steps its “alumni” take outside of it and affect change at a personal, local or global level. The Nomad School Show reaffirms the Caravan’s essential purpose of transforming the lives of the people that put their heart and soul into it.

Finally, my experience creating the Nomad School Show was a defining factor in my decision to go back with my husband for two months during the summer of 2007. During our time there, we filmed 50 hours of video and took around 500
photos for a documentary about the 10th anniversary of the project. While shooting interviews with volunteers and founders, I realized the importance of reflecting, researching and writing about the Caravan’s educational methodology. I began this reflection by writing an article about Nomad Education for Communities Magazine to be published in the Spring 2007 issue. I hope to continue this research and to develop written material that could serve to inspire other people to implement similar projects around the world.

3) Impact on my life as an artist. The completion of Nomad School was like arriving at the top of the mountain. Once I got to the peak I realized that now the work was not reconnecting with my creative self but to actually be an artist “do the work, put in the time”. Once I got to the top of the mountain, I found no more reasons for me not to make art. I had to make some radical changes in my life in order to make art. I was teaching art to elementary students and I was a preschool homeroom teacher. I decided to focus on art teaching, going from a full time to a part time job. This would give me more unstructured time to create and study art on my own.

With a commitment to explore deeper into new symbol systems, I have been working with different kinds of media, taking classes and educating myself about drawing techniques and art history. I am taking simple daily artistic actions (sketching, looking at art, brainstorming ideas, writing poetry). I avoid putting too much pressure on myself about making a “master piece”. Instead I allow my explorations to be aimless and to be comfortable with that –like my students who
are just beginning to understand what the world of art is all about. I am currently embarked in the adventure of pregnancy which gives me some extra fire and inspiration to keep on moving towards the development of my creative career. I do not have any current plans for a new show but I’ve been playing with ideas for a future body of work.

4) **Impact on my life as a teacher:** My teaching has improved in many ways. I have more clarity about the content of the learning experiences I want to offer to my students. My art curriculum has become more substantial as I include material that is conducive to develop specific knowledge about art - as opposed to an “intuitive teaching” approach, which I had already exhausted. For the past two years I worked as the first through fifth grade art teacher at the Missoula International School, but this year I added four preschool and one sixth and seventh grade classes. Teaching the preschoolers nurtures the need to keep things simple, allowing myself to experience the most basic interactions with art. On the other hand, the middle schoolers push me to bring my art and my teaching to a higher level. I am very pleased with the fact that my personal life is almost 100% integrated into my worklife, in a healthy relationship that nurtures both. I realize that the world of art is huge and even though I feel overwhelmed at times, I have chosen to honor my natural creativity and sensitivity, and to stay open to every learning opportunity that comes along the way.
PART II: THE ARTWORK
6. The Drawings

Departure. 24” x 16”

This piece is primarily a journey of reconnection with my past. When I left my country the motif was to leave a life that seemed oppressive and go as far as I could to discover what that life was not offering me. I was ready to go through anything, and I felt like my family and the city I lived in were obstacles that I was supposed to leave behind. In the process of making this piece, I discovered how much resentment I had built inside towards “the city” and it became necessary that I saw this place with different eyes. I wanted to make Bogotá look beautiful and in doing so I made peace with that place and with my departure, seeing it as the beginning of a journey. I used the surreal tree as the passage way to a different reality, transforming what I believed was a moment of escape
into the beginning of my evolution as a human being. The archtypes of the Feathered Seprent, and the Guardian of Dreams appear small in size, hidden in the grass and foliage, symbolizing the idea that they were already present in my unconscious but were waiting for me to wake up in order to become more evident along the journey.

Pachamama 16” x 24”

This is the first drawing I made. The symbols in it talk about transformation and reconnection with myself through the healing power of Pachamama (Mother Earth in Quechua). I appear dressed in a poncho with braided hair which is an image close to my Andean indigenous roots. The figures provide the ground for the landscape and other icons, playing with scale relationships and with the concept of “body as landscape”. The
sunflower is the masculine or sun energy and the cornstalk and the rainbow coming out of the corncob, frame the female. The flower provides a metaphorical landscape for the journey, yet the scale shows that the journey is internal and not just about busses or miles. I used archetypes of the myths that I embodied living with the Caravan: the corn is to many cultures a sacred plant that represents the unity of the Americas and the diversity of races that make our continent; the tree as a symbol of life and connection between Heaven, represented by the stars, and the Earth, represented by mountains, air and the ocean, which are the elements that I believe we are all made of. Finally, the necklace is the glyph of my Mayan Calendar sign which represents the spiritual warrior.
**World Bridger 24” x 16”**

This piece is a depiction of the Caravan’s magic. It is inspired in our time in the Brazilian Amazon and also, in the moment of a dream come true, when a circus tent was gifted to us by a woman in Italy. In the drawing I play with a surrealist setting of a theatre-jungle where a tent appears on the river’s edge to bring the magic of theatre. It represents the capacity of the Caravan to travel to remote places and create magical environments of cultural exchange and art. The four planes on this piece create a great illusion of depth. The jungle trees and animals in the foreground appear both as guardians and witnesses. The theatre curtain sets the site-specific stage for the ephemeral and magical presence of the Caravan. The midplane of the tent represents the theatre in movement, ever adapting. And finally, the background of the river and its farbank represent the backdrop of our personal journey of transformation through theatre.
**Unplugged Human  6” x 9”**

In “Unplugged Human”, a woman holds her heart outside of her body as she is plugged to machines which suck or fill her brain in a prison setting. Despite of the sadness in her face, a tiny little worm is crawling nearby as a symbol of life and hope.

This piece represents the trapped feeling that I sensed before I realized I had the power to transform my life.

**Warrioress of the Spirit  6” x 9”**

This drawing depicts a woman who has been transformed from an “unplugged human” into someone with a free spirit, rooted in the Earth and at peace with the place that she comes from. She has undergone a transformation through the hero’s journey of self discovery and returned with a new vision. Though the place has not changed, her new perspective is represented by the grounded height that she stands on and the wings that represent the bird’s eye view (world vision).
Guardian of Dreams – At Work- & Guardian of Dreams –Celebrating- 6” x 9”

The “Guardian of Dreams” is a being with one eye which represents her power to see beyond the illusions created by society. She has a mirror that she uses to make people see their own reflection when they forget their dream, hoping that they will wake up and pursue it. This character appears in many sketches prior to the Caravan and is deeply related to my search for something higher than myself.
Simple Life 16” x 10”

This triptych depicts examples of the simplicity of life while living and traveling with the Peace Caravan. Drawing from the trinity concept, the “caravanista” appears as an archetype or a model of someone capable of leaving the complexities of society in order to find new ways of being and to serve the planet. The caravanista is someone that is willing to be transformed by the journey and reconnect with her or himself through a lifestyle nurtured by simplicity. The other two panels of the triptych make icons out of the ordinary tasks and objects (i.e. laundry, old boots, tent) elevating them to an honored position as spaces for inner search. The piece looks at my relationship with the routine of the complex life to the ritual of the simple life.
The Feathered Serpent is a mesoamerican god who connects heaven and earth, it is a rainbow bridge. It is known as Quetzalcóatl by the Aztecs, Kukulkán by the Mayas, and Viracocha by the Incas. This drawing melds the archetypes from throughout the Americas as a “world bridger”. In the Caravan theatre, the Serpent appears as a spiritual force that helps transform the world into a place of consciousness and union. It maintains dreams alive and offers strength to the heroes who must wake up humanity from their illusion. This archetype appears also in “Departure” as well as in many other sketches. Here, the Serpent carries the Caravan (represented by its circus tent) around the world representing the unseen forces that seem to guide its journey throughout the Americas.
Temazcal. 24”x 16

Temazcal is the Náhuatl word for “sweatlodge” and it is the one used by caravanistas as we share a form of the traditional ceremony with people we encounter. The Temazcal became the most relevant spiritual practice for me. It unifies the elements of Nature and represents the duality of masculine, represented by the fire, and the feminine, represented by womb-shaped sweatlodge. It helped me understand myself as part of the Earth and her as part of myself. This drawing represents the complexity and simplicity of this relationship through intricate line patterns and the depiction of a female face in the mountains which could be me or the spirit of Mother Earth. The tear rolling down her face is a symbol of the purification that takes place during a sweatlodge ceremony and the figures that emerge from the lodge are the emotions and feelings that the participants in the ceremony release together through the act of sweating, singing and praying together.
7. The Poems

In looking through my travel journals I discovered the power of some of the poems I wrote on the road and their connections with the images I was beginning to create. I found them to be a source of my narrative creative process and realized that they were my most developed art form, because I’ve been writing poetry since I was a teen. They look into how the archetypes took shape in my real life through the journey and helped me process the transformation while making my visual art.

**PACHAMAMA. Winter 2006**

Pachamama heals the path of our dreams when she lifts a storm to heal herself from our unconscious hand. I surrender to her force and I feel free

-under that force there is nothing to fear-

We are her blood, and we have come here by her love

-to search for our path back to her heart-

Pachamama’s love is magic and it runs through our veins. I find the magic in myself when I write lines of creation. This is not logical-mathematical nor can it be explained using meaningless dogma.

I let go and become roots running through her body looking for the elixir of life. I will cry and whine as I forget who I thought I was. I will be true to my origin and let my eyes
dry out and my heart be relieved. Then I will feel the beat pumping her magic through my veins, moving me along the path

I will look beyond the endless mirror, past the horizon, and see the bridges built between all hearts. I will be one with all…beyond and past my unconscious hand.

**Mujer Medicina**

**December 2001**

Mujer Medicina

speaks to me

though she speaks

all at once

You touch my soul

with your sweet words

cress my forehead with your lips

like a mom

You become a mystery

when your whispers wake me

see my dreams becoming true
Mujer Medicina
messenger of time
transforming misleading thoughts as you weave
my far away future you read in the strands

The fire, the mist
a sacred plant, the Moon
we become one thought
when Mujer Medicina speaks

Her tobacco is the magic of her prayers
smoke carrying her words to infinity
Men: listen to her soft voice
Women: give thanks for her words of relief

The truth in her voice
comes from our hearts
and we listen to her song of unique truths

The call comes from wihtin
as roots pierce the soil
as the question preseveres
opennes to understand…

The voice of the Earth Mother sings a stream in my heart

In this way I walk the body of Life
uniting with you
inside
outside

Mujer Medicina
connected with the Universe
You are messenger of cycles, roots and wind
seasons, death, rebirth, love, seed…

Mujer Medicina
travel with me
play the drum
awaken us all from our dream
Here and now discovering

Ecuador, January 2002

Connect
Disconnected
Trap
Set free
Dream
Wake up

I show up for life
with a hand on my heart
wallowing fearless in the crashing waves
jumping into the void filled with questions
with answers
filled with florescent ghosts of the past,
the present… the future

Here I am. This I am.

Pure soul
emotion that doesn’t make sense
Color, harmony

shadows, love. Lost.
Here I am. After drowning in my own fear
I face the ocean and strip off my old skin
an ancient language carries me along
every new day
not knowing what awaits me
feeling every step
the cold sand. The Earth

I make connections.
Through bridges of light I travel
build
destroy
from my bridges I fall
people cross back and forth
-they nurture my life
I nurture theirs

I am a real woman
though the wave might be frightening
I move through with my own force
As I pack my bags
I open invisible doors to a no-time time
one more step away, no way to look back
I dream of my mother’s arms
rocking me down the road of flowers and dragonflies
then, holding me up high
shooting arrows of love through her eyes
I am wrapped in her magic cape of stars

As I pack my bags
I see the road of rainbow flowers and dragonflies
my steps, heavy and strong,
my wings shaking off debris
of past demolition of dreams
non–intended disconnections and short circuits

What can you see in the darkness of a dream?
is there a route for your nomad soul?
will you ever open your tired fist and embrace?
will wounds of the past let your heart speak again?
I dreamt of becoming real

a sculptress of stories

sculpting a door to the road of flowers and dragonflies

a temple of healing and love

a fire dancer of heart

As I pack my bags

A tear of joy slides down my cheek

I dream of my mother’s arms

rocking me down the road of flowers and dragonflies

then, holding me up high

shooting arrows of love through her eyes

I travel through her magic cape of stars.

My steps, heavy and strong,

open invisible doors to a no-time time

one more step

no way to look back
APPENDIX B

CURRICULUM AT THE NOMAD SCHOOL

The Rainbow Peace Caravan is an experiential “school of life” where its volunteers use a hands-on approach to learn about a diversity of skills, values and practices that support the development of self empowered alternative leaders.

Spirituality and Diversity

In the Rainbow Peace Caravan, people of all ages immerse themselves in a dynamic environment of constant movement and change; to survive caravanistas must accept, create, learn and compost a cosmology based on openness and healing, and an intimate connection with the Earth. The spontaneous spiritual practice that is constantly being learned and created on board the Caravan evolves from the individual’s reconnection between the voice of the heart and the power of choice and extends to the collective through the desire to live together and make a change in the world. This practice requires a strong focus on living in the present and is reflected in the ability to participate in daily Caravan rituals such as circling three times a day to share the food, and performing cooperative community tasks in an environment of respect, solidarity and acceptance of each other.

New Millenia Spirituality is learned through the organization of ceremonies such as Temazcales (sweatlodges), Pagamentos (“payments” to the Earth), rites of passage, blessings and the study and application of the 13 Moon Calendar or Mayan Calendar on a daily basis. Caravanistas also experience spirituality by participating in traditional and
new age ceremonies held in host communities. They can participate as observers, initiates, or apprentices. Due to its tribal way of living, the Caravan is constantly invited to many spiritual events, from Brazilian Umbanda and afro-brazilian masses to Solstice and Equinnox celebrations, Latin American native traditional and New Age ceremonies to name a few. These are rich learning opportunities for the Caravan volunteers; they interact with other cultures and strengthen their spiritual connection to the human family.

**Community building**

All aspects of the Caravan life are mixed together and experienced in a community setting. The people involved choose to participate in the process of building a collective which is capable of sustaining itself as it faces the numerous challenges presented along the road. They must learn to act beyond their personal needs and instead, attend the needs of the whole as a way to provide what they require for themselves. Living in this community implies a high level of self motivation and an individual interest in improving communication skills and participating in a horizontal organization that makes decisions using a Consensus methodology.

**Simple Living**

To envision the experience of life in the Rainbow Peace Caravan, imagine a Medieval caravan; replace the wagons and horses with old school buses transformed into colorful vehicles equipped with both rudimentary and modern artifacts needed in daily survival and work. Imagine the caravanistas living in tents, eating on grass mats, washing clothes by hand, circling up before each meal, singing together whenever the opportunity arises,
sharing resources and tools and basically, living at the service of others “24-7”. This is a lifestyle that most of the people who join the project are not used to; it requires an openness to unlearn individualistic and materialistic habits developed in the mainstream society and a focus on the present time filled with communal tasks, challenges and gifts.

Connections with the Earth

There are many channels which connect a “student” of the Caravan with the Earth. Some people involve themselves primarily with activities of restoration, conservation, and protection of the physical body of the Earth. Other people embrace the spiritual-artistic aspect of our connections with Mother Earth. Constant crossing of geographical borders compels us to relate to all kinds of climates and landscapes. Caravanistas can engage in designing systems of recycling for the community and teaching kids about garbage. They can design permacultural systems for nomad living, teach green building, organic farming, natural health and nutrition and create agreements to improve their collective patterns of resource consumption, etc.

Living in cultural diversity

Throughout the history of the Peace Caravan over 300 volunteers from more than 30 countries, (mostly from the Americas and Europe) have come and gone. Individuals from a broad spectrum of social, educational and racial backgrounds, come to live together to do daily chores as a team, make decisions together, shop for food at the big whole sale markets, cook, get sick, heal, work, make money, celebrate, fall in love, fight, suffer, and celebrate as they travel throughout the Americas. Additionally, they interact constantly
with the hundreds of cultures that they encounter along the road: peasants, artists, shamans, bureaucrats, street performers and artisans, main stream families, street children, soldiers, alternative families, police, indigenous people, religious people….. and more.

Art as a tool for change

The Caravan’s main way of building bridges with new cultures is through the arts, specifically theatre. Volunteers engage in a variety of theatrical experiences such as putting on plays and street performances. Every individual is welcome to participate independently from their level of experience. Some people come as masters, teaching technique, writing and directing, and others come as apprentices. Other people don’t even come with the idea of “acting” and they end up trying it out and discovering a new way to express themselves. Depending on the crew and location there might be opportunities to develop performance skills through courses and workshops offered by caravanistas and host communities. There are many opportunities to both create and witness art.

Volunteers engage in other forms of art by teaching their skills to host communities, maintaining murals painted on the vehicles, doing carpentry, learning crafts from their peers and exchanging experiences with local artistic personalities and grassroots organizations. A highlight of this kind of exchange is the recent encounter with the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, one of the world’s greatest social theatre schools founded by Brazilian author, pedagogue and theatre director, Augusto Boal.
Soul of an artist

Arts columnist Simone Ellis looks at new work at the University of Montana and the Ceretana Studio – and finds that the future of art is secure in some very young hands.

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‘Caravan’ of earthy delights

Artist Baquero pays homage to her connection with the planet

By SIMONE ELLIS
for the Missoulan

It is officially spring, and in the spirit of blooming spring flowers and the welcome return of the sun, two hot spots in Missoula are featuring artists who are bursting onto the scene. This is a group of inspired, individualistic artists that we will certainly be seeing more of in the future in Missoula’s galleries and museums.

- “Nomad School: A Journey in South America with the Caravana Arcoiris por la Paz,” Penelope Baquero, Ceretana Gallery, 801 Sherwood, Missoula. Contact for hours, 880-2287, or by e-mail: leenarcoiris@yahoo.com. Closing celebration Friday, April 28, 7-9 p.m.

It is not often that one gets to write about an art project that is larger than the life of any individual artist, while at the same time is an accessible feast for the eyes and inclusive to all ages, creeds, pigment and languages. Such is the case of “La Caravana Arcoria por la Paz,” or “Rainbow Peace Caravan.”

Though the words “rainbow” and “peace” have been badly appropriated by pop culture and even by politicians, this caravan of artists and peacemakers is boldly dedicated to actually making a difference in thousands of people’s lives, through theater, art, health, agriculture, permaculture and consensus training – all under the umbrella of the full spectrum of diversity. “Caravana Arcoiris por la Paz,” translates literally as the “Arc of the Iris Peace Caravan,” and it is the natural full spectrum of human community that the caravan addresses on their journey through the Americas. The caravan is authentic, productive and packed with talent. More than 50 countries have been represented by the caravan’s volunteers during its 10-year treks through 16 countries.

One eight-year veteran of the caravan is Missoula resident: Penelope Baquero, who is the focus of an exhibition at the Ceretana Gallery – the old grain elevator on the border of the north and west sides of Missoula. The show is a thesis exhibit for Baquero’s master of fine arts in integrated arts and education, or “creative pulse” degree at the University of Montana. Creative pulse is the perfect degree program for this enthusiastic and talented young woman from Bogota, Colombia. Baquero draws, paints, dances, does improvisational theater, shoots slides, paints buses and teaches children – just to name a few of her skills. At 32 she has traveled and made an impact on – as well as learned from – cultures all through the Americas, including the Amazon’s jeweled city, Manaus, where Baquero was the only one in the caravan who spoke Portuguese and had to on-the-spot translate a performance for a huge crowd in downtown Manaus. Nothing seems to daunt this woman, and each of her drawings capture the spirit behind that courageous path of discovery.

“Departure” depicts a woman peacefully, resolutely walking into a ceiba tree via a door that has magically opened in the trunk. She wears a backpack and good walking shoes, and we have the feeling that she is going to be gone from the cityscape of Bogota in the background, for a long time – for as long as it takes to complete her mission.

“Pachamamma y Yo” shows us the face of the same young woman. She gazes out at us from a lush growth of corn, a sunflower, a magical jumping fish and stars – a ceiba tree grows out of her heart. In the background we can see the caravan buses crawling over high mountain passes, which turn out to be the leaves of the sunflower. Given the title – “pachamamma” means “great Earth mother” and “yo” means “and me” – and the fact that the woman in the picture looks a lot like Baquero, one could guess that the drawing is a depiction of herself as

See BAQUERO, Page E5
Baquero

Continued

pachamamma. On the other hand, one might also see it as an iconoclastic drawing reflecting the divinity of pachamamma as she manifests in individuals. Certainly the experience of the caravan has brought this already Earth-loving individual closer to pachamamma.

However one reads the content of the brilliant pen and ink drawings on display at the Ceretana, don’t miss the magnificent and sentient line she uses to make these drawings. They are Picasso-like, Frida Kahlo-like and unlike both references, consistently bright, happy and full of hope.

The closing ceremony on April 28 from 7 to 9 p.m. will be a good opportunity to see Baquero’s drawings, meet the artist, see some of her structured improvisational theater and view colorful photographs by co-founder of the caravan, Alberto Ruz Buenfil. One can also call or e-mail for an appointment to view the show and discuss the caravan with Baquero or her husband, Missoula artist Jason Gutzmer, laranarcoiris@yahoo.com.

Don’t miss this one, folks. Missoula is the West’s home base for this optimistic international venture, and who knows, maybe you or your children will be on the next caravan bus to head out! This year the caravan is visiting 48 places in Brazil, and thankfully, there is no end in sight.
INTENT OF THE PROJECT:

After my experience in the Creative Pulse, I realized the importance and need to process my experience with The Rainbow Peace Caravan (www.lacaravana.org) in an artistic way. This project has the capacity to deeply impact and transform all people that are touched by it and in consequence, its potential as a model for nomadic schools deserves to be addressed in as many medias as possible.

My intent is to compile my stories and the stories of the Caravan’s former and current volunteers and create a book that informs different aspects of the project as a “Nomadic Living and Learning Center”. The stories will be compiled and edited by me and will be organized in chapters that refer to the Caravan as a learning place for:

- Global citizenship
- Living in cultural diversity
- The artist in us all
- Simple living
- Connections with the Earth
- Community building
- Spirituality
- Survival and adventure
I intend to use photographs from the Caravan’s archives as well as my own illustrations.

MY BACKGROUND

I have been part of the Rainbow Peace Caravan since December of 1998. I traveled with them through Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. (The Caravan is currently in Argentina). When I was not physically with them I raised money from Missoula and supported networking activities through the Internet. I am currently one of the representatives of the Mobile Region of the Ecovillage Network of the Americas (www.ecovillage.org), along with the main visionary of the project, Alberto Ruz Buenfil.

During my life in the community, I became one of its leaders thanks to my organizational, artistic and teaching skills, knowledge of four languages and public relations skills. I discovered my passion for understanding the process of building a community, and the way people needed to transform themselves in order to become truly involved. I discovered that the success of a community depends on its capacity to empower the leader within every single one of its members and I pushed along with other members to integrate a circular structure for decision making that included the professional, artistic, spiritual and emotional aspects of everyone involved in the project.

I feel like I still need to make sense of my experience with the Caravan because I am interested in reproducing this model and extend it to other parts of the continent. I think this is a great opportunity for my development as an artist and communicator and it will help me increase my knowledge of nomadic living, which I believe to be a lifestyle that could offer much to the transformation of our societies.
APPROACH, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

First of all, I am interested in doing research about ancient and contemporary nomadic communities and the ways in which they learn and school their children. This will give me a wider perspective on how to approach the organization of the stories and will give the book a more defined context.

The stories will be compiled using the Internet to connect and reconnect with as many former and current volunteers as possible. I will use a set of questions that will guide the “caravanistas” to write new stories or submit old ones about the themes listed above, as well as offer me a profile of each one of the people involved in the book. Their stories will be used in their entirety or parts of them; they will be edited and placed in each of the chapters. I foresee a lot of translation from Spanish and Portuguese.

I will include my own stories, which will be mostly based on my journal entries. I am planning to have an introductory chapter about the history of the Caravan and its success as a community.

I am planning to use photographs from the Caravan’s archives as well as my own illustrations in black ink.

The dilemma of publishing is unresolved. I would like to consult with my committee and other community members about my possibilities to make this book available to the general audience.

TIMELINE

August-October: Compilation of stories (time required is uncertain)
Compilation of photographic and videographic documentation of the Caravan
Research on the history of the Caravan
Research on nomadic living

**October - March**
Research on nomadic living
Reception of more stories
Writing/editing
Drawing
Research on publishing opportunities

**April**
Third party edition
Inclusion of selections of the book in the Caravan’s website
Submission for publishing (publishing is not intended to be achieved before graduation due to its uncertainty)

**May**
Presentation of the project to CP committee. (this date might have to be adjusted)

**ANTICIPATED RESULTS**
- The completion of a book about the Rainbow Peace Caravan as a model for a Nomadic Living and Learning Center
- Improvement on my English writing skills
- Improvement of my drawing/designing skills
- Development of my first product that includes writing, drawing and research
- The creation of a product that will add to the documentation of the Caravan’s journey
- Development of computer word processing and image processing skills

HOPES
- To create a document that will motivate my husband and I to begin our own independent nomadic school based in Missoula, Montana
- To find out what I can do for myself as an artist
- To find that space of creativity and keep it forever
- To prove to myself that I can be my own boss
- To find the encouragement to develop a career as an independent artist-teacher-revolutionary-activist…. Ultimately, I would like to employ myself.
- The creation of a network of current and old caravanistas.
Bibliography


  audio cassette series


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