

Wetlands on the Paintbrush: A Self-Profile of José Herrera Gallegos and Selected Art

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights my self-profile and some selected wetland art pieces, among them the watercolor “Pantanos de Centla, Tabasco, Mexico” a donation as the prize for the winner of their Latin American Caribbean (LAC) wetland photo contest. I’ve documented various Mexican ecosystems from deserts to wetlands. My works and palette are dominated by earthy colors such as burnt sienna and ochre yellow, balanced with cold colors such as turquoise blue and viridian green. One of my upcoming projects is to set up an exhibition with the theme of the Mexican seas and waters in Baja California Sur.

RESUMEN

Este artículo destaca mi perfil personal y algunas obras de arte seleccionadas sobre humedales, entre ellas la acuarela “Pantanos de Centla, Tabasco, México”, una donación

como premio para el ganador de su concurso de fotografía de humedales en el Caribe Latinoamericano (LAC). He documentado varios ecosistemas mexicanos desde desiertos hasta humedales. Mis obras y mi paleta están dominadas por colores terrosos como el siena tostado y el amarillo ocre, equilibrados con colores fríos como el azul turquesa y el verde viridian. Uno de mis próximos proyectos es montar una exposición con la temática de los mares y aguas mexicanas en Baja California Sur.

BACKGROUND

Since I donated a piece of art to the Society of Wetland Scientists for use as the prize for the winner of their Latin American Caribbean (LAC) wetland photo contest, they offered me an opportunity to tell folks about my development as an award-winning artist.

Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, a multi-ethnic and multicultural city and one of the cradles of Mexican art, I am heir to the legacy that local artists left behind, especially Rufino Tamayo and Francisco Toledo (Figure 1). My career has not been academic as I learned by observing some artists from this city having discovered my natural talent for drawing at the age of 10. I have been a teacher of art education and a member of artist groups in Oaxaca where I explored the techniques of engraving, oil, acrylics and mixed techniques, and finally settling on watercolors as a career. I am one of many active watercolorists in Mexico, giving workshops in most of the states. I belong to the



Figure 1. José Herrera Gallegos in his atelier.

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Mexican Society of Watercolorists and am currently part of the ESTAMPA gallery in Oaxaca. My style is defined by constant evolution, beginning with traditional watercolor almost 20 years ago, even reaching abstraction today using alternative materials, where I disassociate myself from the term “watercolor” to give way to a dialogue with aqueous techniques, playing with different formats and textures.

Since 2012, my career has taken off when I won the amateur watercolor contest organized by the Ministry of Culture of Mexico, breaking into the vibrant Mexican cultural endeavor. Since then I’ve received various awards inside and outside of Mexico. Not having completed a degree related to the arts, I chose to absorb knowledge by traveling the globe to learn how watercolor was reflected in the vision of different artists while also attending numerous festivals in Europe, Asia and South America. Among my accomplishments are: the last winner of Potrer Art Argentina in 2019 (the only Mexican to achieve it); two honorable mentions in the prize of the Mexican Society of Watercolorists, second place in the International Watercolor Society watercolor biennial in Quito Ecuador in 2017, representative artist of the Mexican delegation in Fabriano in acquarello 2018 and second place in the Tlaloc 2019 prize. Before the eruption of social networks, I had already participated in numerous collective exhibitions in the United States; in galleries in Austin Texas, Los Angeles, Pasadena, Sebastopol and San Francisco California; Arizona, New York, Massachusetts and Seattle. In recent months I have participated in the meeting of watercolorists in Frutillar Chile in November 2022, in 2023 Potrer art, potrero de

los Funes in Argentina, Ayacucho watercolor meeting in Peru and recently in plein air Prague in Czech Republic, Fabriano and Urbino in Acquarello (in Italy) and gave a watercolor workshop in Beziers, France.

MEXICAN ECOSYSTEM WATERCOLORS

I’ve traveled throughout Mexico and through the watercolor technique I’ve documented various Mexican ecosystems from deserts to jungles and wetlands (Figures 2-5) by highlighting human interactions with these sites and the observation of the delicate balance that they maintain. My works and palette are dominated by earthy colors such as burnt sienna and ochre yellow, balanced with cold colors such as turquoise blue and viridian green. One of my upcoming projects is to set up an exhibition with the theme of the Mexican seas and waters in Baja California Sur.

PANTANOS DE CENTLA, TABASCO, MEXICO

Centla is the largest area of wetlands in North America: a refuge and breeding area for large populations of migratory waterfowl with high biological wealth. Located in the northeast of the state of Tabasco, it covers 302,706 ha in the municipalities of Centla, Jonuta, Macuspana and Campeche, and is home to one of the largest hydrological systems in Mexico (Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers). The swamps are one of the ecosystems with the greatest biodiversity along with estuaries, dunes, marshes, mangroves, fluvial islands and water mirrors where a great variety of fish, mollusks, insects, reptiles and plants live. Among its flora and fauna, the red, black, and white mangrove, the

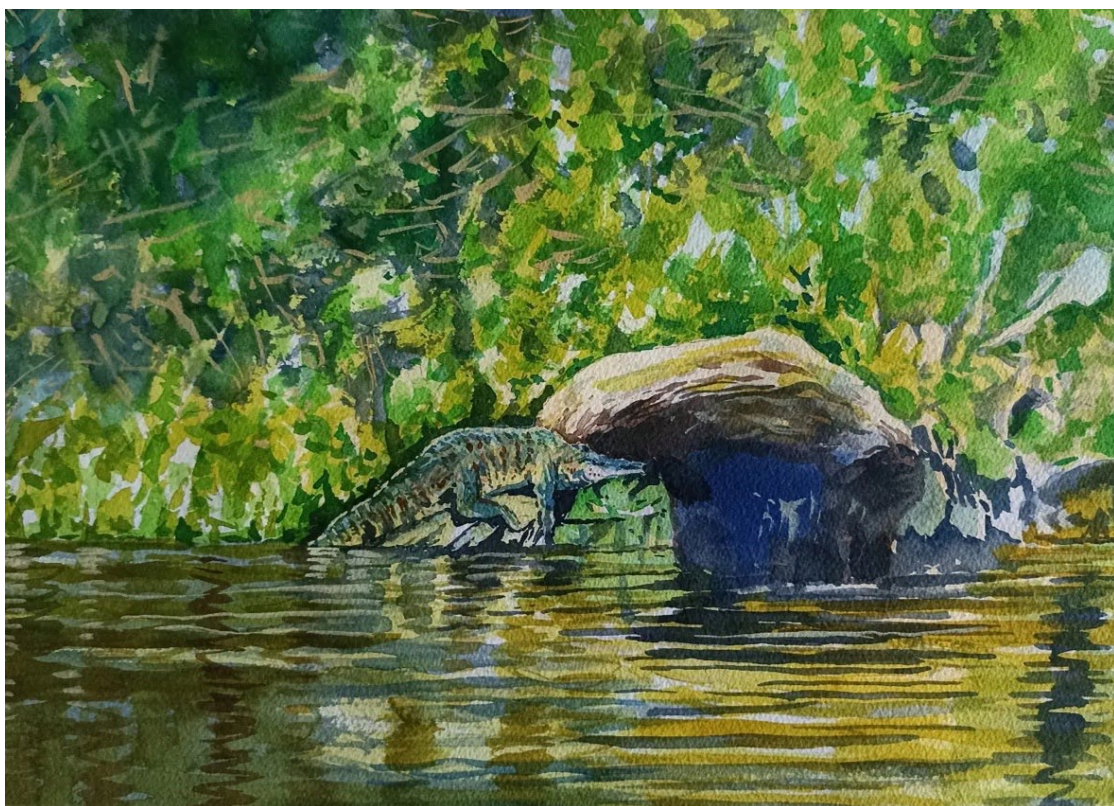


Figure 2. Watercolor of Pantanos de Centla, Tabasco, Mexico, 2023 by José Herrera Gallegos. This was honored as the first prize for the winner of the SWS LAC photo contest for 2024 (the photo is featured on this cover of this issue - January 2024).

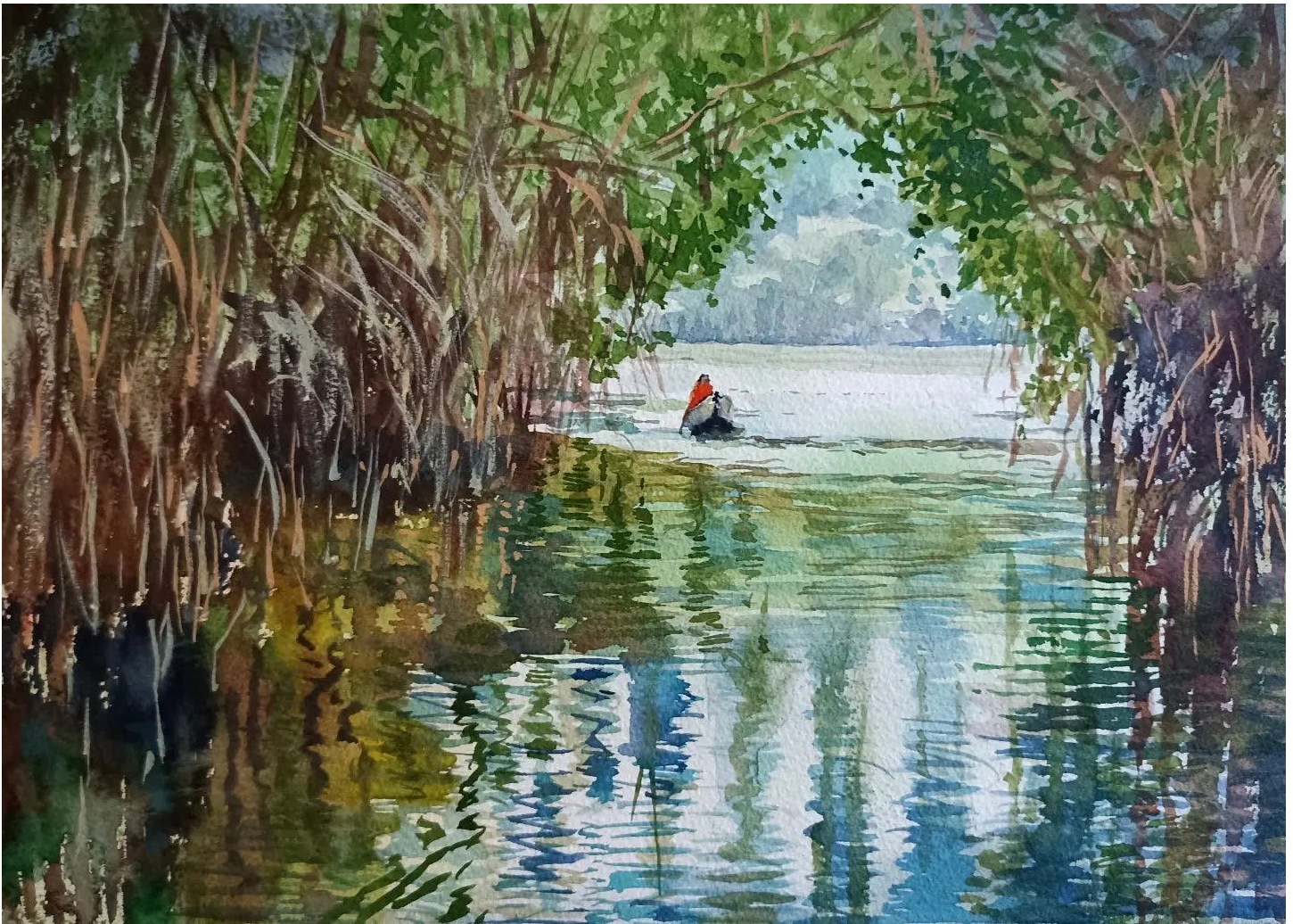


Figure 3. Watercolor of the mangroves of Lagunas de Chacahua, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2023 by José Herrera Gallegos.

howler monkey, caiman and green iguana stand out, as well as some endangered species: jaguar, ocelot, manatee, peregrine falcon, white turtle, and the Jabirú stork (the largest bird in Mexico).

LAGUNAS DE CHACAHUA, OAXACA, MEXICO

Lagunas de Chacahua National Park, Oaxaca is one of the most representative natural protected areas of the Oaxaca coast. The lagoons were decreed as a National Park on July 9, 1937 and recognized as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site) in February 2008. The Park is the habitat of three species of sea turtles: Laud, Carey and Golfina, which nest on the beaches of San Juan and Bahía de Chacahua. Among the environmental services provided by this National Park, the following stand out: carbon capture, oxygen production, aesthetic value for tourism, food production for different organisms such as shrimp, aquifer recharge and biodiversity maintenance.

AXOLOTL

The Mexican Axolotl or Axolotl, *Ambystoma mexicanum*, is a salamander with the unusual characteristic of retaining its larval features into its adult life. This condition, known as neoteny, means that it retains its tadpole-like dorsal fin



Figure 4. Watercolor of Axolotl, Mexico, 2021 by José Herrera Gallegos.

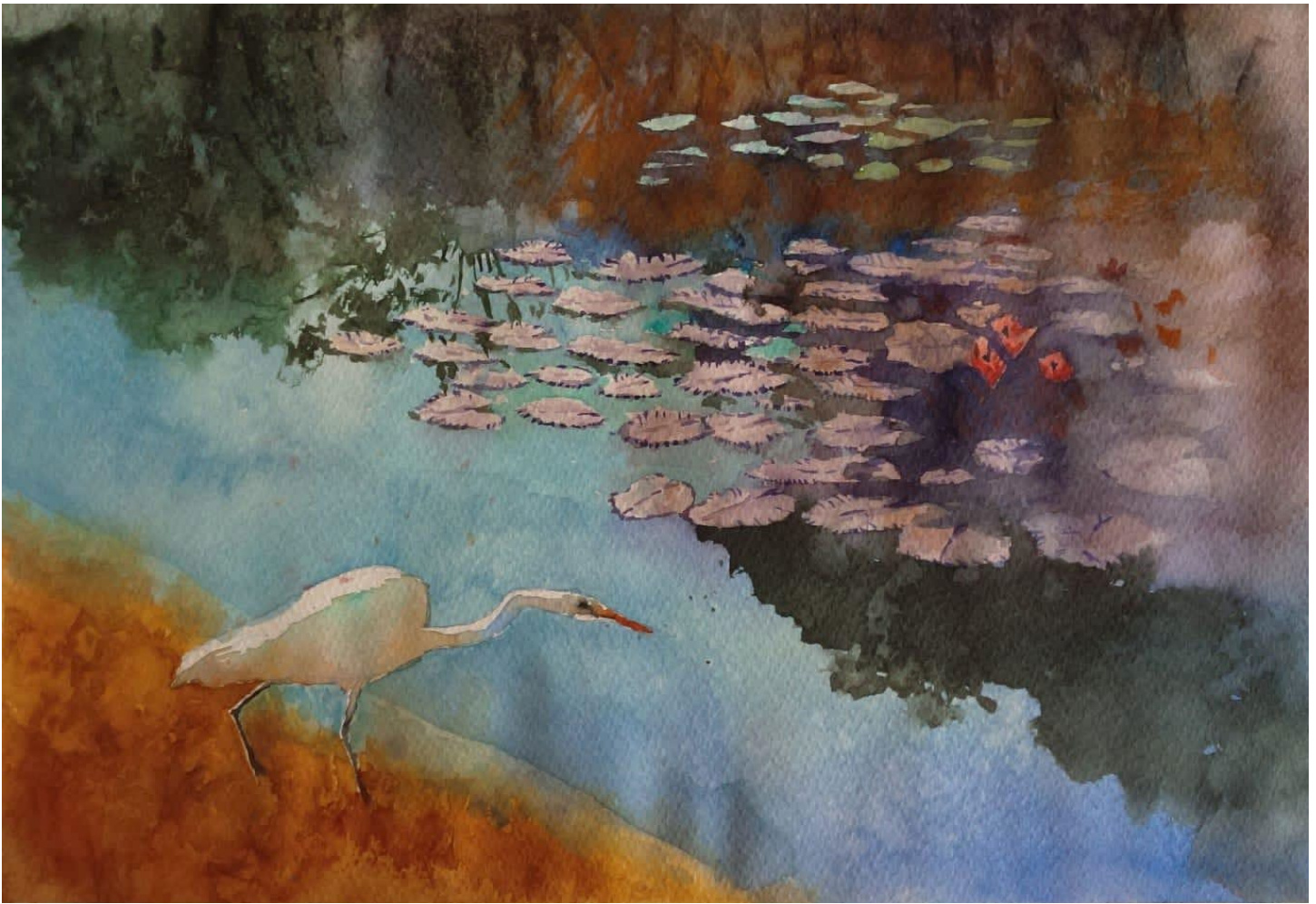


Figure 5. Watercolor of Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) and Egyptian Blue Water Lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*) in East Park, Caracas, Venezuela, 2020 by José Herrera Gallegos.

which runs nearly the entire length of its body, and its external gills which protrude from the back of its broad, feather-like head. This unique amphibian is in critical danger of extinction according to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, due to habitat loss, the introduction of invasive species into its habitat, overexploitation, pollution, and its consumption as food. The Axolotl is found only in the lake complex of Xochimilco (pronounced Sochimilco), near Mexico City, and differs from most salamanders in that it lives permanently in the water. In extremely rare cases, the Axolotl matures and emerges from the water, but in most cases, they prefer to stay at the bottom of Xochimilco's lakes and canals.

PARQUE DEL ESTE, CARACAS, VENEZUELA

East Park (Parque del Este) is a public recreation park in the Leoncio Martínez Parish, Sucre Municipality, in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, in Venezuela. An attraction for birders as well as others seeking an experience with nature or a pleasant stroll or jog within the city, it is home to more than 130 species of national flora and numerous animal species.

RECENT HERRERA'S COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS:

- 2022 "Musas" galería KUMUTU . Loreto baja California Sur, México.
- 2021 Acuarela mexicana en Moscú. Galería Sare Moscú, Rusia
- 2020. Legados por generaciones pasadas, Sangremal galería. Querétaro, México.
- 2020 "Oaxaca en acuarela" Estampa galería. Oaxaca México.
- 2019 México en acuarela Sala de exposiciones JUANA FRANCÉS. Madrid, España.
- 2019 "Encanto de luna y agua" Centro de las artes "Santa Rosa de Viterbo". Querétaro México.
- 2018 "Dialéctica Oaxaqueña" Augusta Savage gallery. Amherst, Massachusetts USA.

RECENT HERRERA'S INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS:

- 2021 "TORRENTES" Galería Angie Campoy Inclán. Querétaro México.
- 2019 "RECENT WORKS" Loreto bay gallery. Loreto, Baja California Sur, México.
- 2018 "Herrera Gallegos: Mexican watercoloris" La Peña gallery. Austin, Texas. USA.