

Celebrating
Womanhood
and Femininity

with

Micaela Ortega



Artist Micaela Ortega lives and works in Bogotá, Colombia

Hello Micaela, thank you for doing this interview with us. Let's start our conversation with a little time travel – do you remember the first time you got in touch with visual art or created something?

Ever since I can remember, I had the urge to make art, and I've been very fortunate to have parents who have always encouraged me. When I was three and my younger sister was just a few months old, we started *Clase de Bebés* (baby class) organized by my mom and other mothers in our neighborhood in Bogotá. Among other things, we did finger paintings, and I produced my first work on canvas—a colorful mess of glitter and handprints—which is still hanging next to my mom's bed.

You are currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. It sounds as though it has always been clear to you that you wanted to pursue art professionally – would you agree?

It was always clear to me that I wanted to be an artist, but I began my university studies at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the instability of the time, I had a moment of uncertainty and briefly chose to major in design as a seemingly more practical career path. I did design for a year and a half before admitting to myself that I had been too scared to take the risk to pursue visual arts. I found myself increasingly frustrated with the commercial aspect of the field and its emphasis on the consumer. The parts of Design that I liked were the creative aspects, which left me more certain that what I actually wanted was to study art. Above my mom's desk is one of my school works from the second grade, which proudly states, "When I am old, I want to be an artist." Minus my poor spelling, that statement holds true; I still want to be an artist when I'm old.

You work with different techniques and mediums such as ceramics, embroidery, and painting. What do each of these techniques offer you from an artistic point of view

and is there any you feel especially drawn to?

Drawing and painting are the first visual languages I learned to express myself in. Most recently, I've been really drawn to ceramics, embroidery, and textiles, all of which allow me to shift away from the two-dimensional canvas and towards a more tactile and dynamic creative process. Though I treasure these techniques individually, I find that artistically, they offer me the most when combined. Painting on textiles, drawing on clay, embroidering an oil painting... Overall, these mediums force me to embrace the slow and meditative process of art-making.

“In a chaotic world that demands constant productivity and expects efficiency, the repetitive action of embroidery, crocheting, sitting at the wheel, or spending hours on a section of a painting becomes a form of meditation.”

You describe your work as a celebration of femininity through which you explore womanhood and the intersection between gender and politics. Can you please tell us more about your work and why these topics are important to you?

I had a very political upbringing. My parents raised me as a feminist, and I've been going to marches and protests since I was little. Art became a way of interrogating and working through the questions that emerged as I grappled with growing up in a very catholic and conservative country with left-of-center parents.

While I have work that's explicitly feminist and more obviously political, such as *Ovaries and Rosaries*, for example there's also a more subtle and politically calculated undertone to working with mediums that have been relegated to the category of craft as opposed to art. Often in Latin America and particularly in Colombia, these mediums are dominated by women and considered menial and feminine.

Using these mediums to create work that isn't strictly utilitarian is an attempt to challenge the deeply embedded logic of patriarchy and capitalism.

Is there any piece or project you'd like to speak about in more detail?

Ovaries and Rosaries was largely the product of a recent historic victory for women in Colombia. Despite being a conservative Christian country, the Constitutional Court in Colombia decriminalized abortion up to the 24th week of gestation on February 21st, 2022, making it one of the most progressive legislatures on women's rights in Latin America. This monumental step was won through the tireless efforts of the feminist movement. Women's right to an abortion has always been very important to me, and having participated in the protests, I wanted to make something that reflected the moment and subverted Catholic imagery and symbols to challenge the theological arguments of Colombia's pro-life movement.

There is a lot of talk about finding your “own voice” in the art world, more so when you're getting started as an artist. Is that something that is important to you or are you currently focused on learning and experimenting with different techniques and mediums?

I think for me, both of those things go hand in hand. Right now, I'm focused on exploring new mediums, broadening my creative skillset, and seeing what interests me about different materials and the way they interact with each other. I think that through the exploration of mediums, I've slowly begun to create a visual language that looks and feels like me. There are still so many techniques and mediums I'd like to explore, for example metalworking as well as making larger installation pieces.

“Finding my own voice hasn't been a static process but instead something that is ever changing and evolving as I grow.”

One of our favourite questions is about the creative process. How do you usually get from starting a piece to finishing it? Do you do any sketching, for example, and where do you find inspiration while working?

I usually don't make that many sketches of my work – I think by making. When I have a vague idea of what I want to make, I just start. A lot of the time, my ideas will change and evolve while I work, and the end product might not look anything like the idea I began with. I find a lot of inspiration in my surroundings, bits of which are later reflected in my work. My current fixation is the decorative wrought iron gates and bars of houses in Bogotá. Previously, it was altars and objects of worship. I don't currently have my own studio, so a lot of my creative process takes place in my room and at my university. Because of the rapid pace of the curriculum, I tend to work on a lot of things simultaneously and relatively quickly, so my projects often inform and mirror each other.

Would you mind sharing with us what you've been working on lately?

Over the past year and a half, I have been working on and off on a series of dresses that I'm excited to finish. The series consists of three garments: two slip dresses and a shirt—aimed at depicting the grief of losing someone close and the emotions that come with falling in love. The dresses incorporate oil painting, embroidery, and beadwork, while the shirt, which is handsewn and dyed, has Batik patterns and embroidery.

And let's end our conversation with four last questions. First one, how would you describe the Bogotá art scene?

Colombian history, particularly of the internal armed conflict, is reflected in its art and by its artists. Although Colombia's Peace Accord was negotiated in 2016, the conflict didn't end and continues to permeate every aspect of our society. The indirect violence of the conflict is everywhere in Bogotá and is a recurrent theme in a lot of the art being produced. However, from this turmoil emerges a very vibrant and interesting art scene, which is informed by the current political situation. There's a lot for an artist to respond to.

A new year has just begun – what are your hopes for 2025?

My main hope for this year is to be able to dedicate more time to my work, hopefully, participate in more shows in Bogotá, and build stronger ties to the art scene there. There's also a chance I'll be in Chicago this summer, and I'd really love to connect with local artists.

Are there any fellow emerging artists you'd like to recommend?

Lately I've been really inspired by Laura Serna's ceramics (@polvoindigo) and Maria Fernanda Cuervo (@mariacuervomariaa), especially her piece *Método de patronaje y guía para la construcción de un cuerpo*. In terms of painting, Rory Torstensson (www.rorytorstensson.com) and Esther Pethukova's (<https://esterpetukhova.com>) have been recent sources of inspiration.

And last one, please describe your work in three words to a stranger.

Intuitive, surreal, and thoughtful

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Forbidden Fruits, Ceramic Sculptures, 2023, 28 x 23 cm and 15 x 23 cm (up)
Homage to Nik, 2023, Ceramic Sculpture, 28 x 25 cm (down left)
Reliquia #2, 2024, 15 x 10 cm (down right)



Mama, 2023, Screenprint, 50 x 35 cm (up)
Reliquia #1 (front and back), Ceramic sculpture with engobe, 30 x 13 cm (down)



Ovaries and Rosaries, 2022
Oil on canvas, embroidery, installation, 90 x 60 cm



Warrior, 2024
White clay and engobe, 24 x 24 cm

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with growing up in
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conservative country
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– Micaela Ortega