



ART AND CULTURE

Teresa Jiménez*

Sergio Hernández's *Popol Vuh*

Sergio Hernández, born in 1957 in the town of Santa María Xochistlapilco, in the Mixtec Mountains, is one of Oaxaca's most distinguished representatives of the visual arts. In his hands, any material becomes art.

Hernández has recreated the cosmogonical book of the Quiché Maya, the *Popol Vuh*, in a 30-sheet engraving portfolio. In this work, he reinterprets not only the origin of humanity, but also of himself, of his Oaxaca, his country, his lineage. Here is a conversation with this artist of bright colors, ancestral forms, and flowing lines reminiscent of cave art and the beginning of all things. Sergio Hernández, a member of a first people and an original.

* Editor-in-chief of *Voices of Mexico*, CISAN, UNAM; tejian@unam.mx.
Sergio Hernández *Popol Vuh*, engravings, 20 x 20 cm, 2011-2012.
Photos, courtesy of the author.



Voices of Mexico: As Jaime Moreno Villarreal said, “With your *Popol Vuh*, you have created creation.” Why would you interpret the sacred book of the Maya? Was it to find your own origins?

Sergio Hernández: The origin of our species is rooted in shamanism, in magic, and the book of the Quiché Maya is no exception. This book holds the knowledge of their daily life in the jungle. A journey in my work is the journey to the creative pictorial world, bringing them alive through a comic or manga technique, like a comic book where these magical siblings of the grandmother and the fauna are sketched: ants, fleas, bats, the serpent, the frog, the eagle, who swarm through that history. The dramatic ending, which includes the tragedy of life in that book, is that our brothers, both in the past and in the present, are scorched, burned to a crisp, and ground up on their grinding stones, thrown into the river, transformed into stars with the light of the night. . . . From then on have the stars existed. All these scenes are sketched, lit, and interpreted with more questions than answers.

VM: Where does your imaginary come from? What have your visual reference points been?

SH: The literary works of León-Portilla, *La visión de los vencidos* (The View of the Vanquished); Mayao Miyazaki, with *Spirited Away*; *Chanoc*, by Martín de Lucenay and Ángel Mora; *La Familia Burrón* (The Burrón Family), by Gabriel Vargas; the dead characters of Carlos Castañeda and Juan Rulfo . . . stories of the underworld.



VM: Your series of engravings includes plants, animals, deities, and humans in a space where the primordial and the original evolve into other forms and other beings, but they also seem to retreat. Is involution perhaps inevitable?

SH: Yes. Humanity has come to a point in which it has marked its own extinction, "like crabs walking backwards." And these drawings make the observation that the book talks about, the beginning and the end. At the beginning, nothingness; but at the end, nothingness again. Involution is inevitable; the extinction of many species has caught up with the human species, which is destroying itself. I mention that the visual interpretation of this portfolio is a celebration of this prophetic teaching.









VM: The ancient Maya beliefs in the *Popol Vuh* refer to the men of corn being limited by the gods so they could not see and hear everything. What do you think limits us today, preventing us from seeing and hearing our indigenous roots?

SH: Humanity does not want to know, hear, see. . . . It is soaked in information without understanding. Information, culture, education are consumed in supermarkets. We do not accept our past; we deny ourselves by denying our origins.

We have become great consumers of lies. We don't want to seem like our ancestors; we're ashamed. We emigrate to the big cities and are happy in malls. **VM**