

# Diego Yturbe

## Voyage around Himself Through Eighty Worlds

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*Setting out on a voyage always implies encountering something new and leaving something behind, something that will remain*

*unmovable until our return. The body advances, the view widens, the game imposes itself once again. The child we all have inside of us is reborn, and that child tries to recognize him or herself in new people and new ideals.*

*This is the way Diego Yturbe has projected his fantasy voyages, portraying the people who took him in for a few days or weeks to live together around a basic principle —so lost today— called hospitality. Both the stories and the images are endless, but what is special about his work is not the mixture of image and text, but the way technology has been combined with manual activity. The original watercolors were given as gifts to the people who put him up. The works presented here, then, are nothing but the evocation of the pathways that it took him more than a year to travel.*



*I and my other selves, 2005.*

**A**lienation because of the media and the way of life in the planet's large cities is atrophying their inhabitants' ability to understand the human race's diversity and cultural riches and the wealth of landscapes that make up our world. In our day, it is very difficult to make an urban dweller understand that the wonder that is the sea and the sand does not require the comfort of a hotel and a discotheque,

with all their destructiveness, for paradise to be revealed to human beings.

I live in a rural community at the foot of the mountains, and every time friends from Mexico City, New York, Paris or Los Angeles visit me, I invite them for a walk in the woods, to see the rivers and waterfalls tumbling down from the mountains. I am concerned at how many of them are fearful and reticent to set out on the earthen paths, how they look mistrustfully at the exuberant vegetation; their

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heads seem to be full of old atavistic stories about serpents, tarantulas and coyotes, as though fear of the sting and the bite kept them from perceiving the wonders of nature, the prodigiousness of our primordial home. I was born in one of the world's largest cities and enjoy everything it has to offer whenever I visit. However, I do not close my eyes to a Mexico City that is becoming one of the country's biggest problems, a large part of which is because of its unhealthy relationship with the natural habitat where it was built.

More than presenting us with a series of works of art, the work of Diego Yturbe narrates a voyage that recovers a sample of the world's cultural plurality and some of the most beautiful natural spaces that survive the onslaught of hyper-industrialization.

As a visual log of his intense voyage, Diego accompanied every image with a paragraph that situates us in the region of the Earth where the scene takes place, and introduces us to the characters that appear in each one, as well as some cultural references that help us perceive the worlds he visited. Without knowing beforehand what he would end up doing, Diego went through Cuba, Pakistan, the Himalayas and France doing watercolors. Spontaneously, almost from the start of his adventure, he began to give his watercolors away to the people he stayed with, the people who served his food or simply spent a little time with him, as a way of saying "Thank you." Since he also wanted to get into the art world, he kept a record of his work so that he could later see the evolution of his sketching, composition and color palette. His intention at that time was not to make art works out of digitalized watercolors; he just might want to send them to a friend over the Internet. His long itinerary showed not only that he was looking for adventure, but that he was also immersing himself inside himself, a spiritual road whose central tool was traveling to the places as different from

each other as we can imagine: from a rural cabin that acts as defense against the bureaucratic dictatorship of Cuban socialism to the sculptural houses carved out of the Capadocia rock formations that remit us to the time of cavemen and the functionalist houses of that emblem of modernity that is the Cité Radieuse of Le Corbusier in France.

After his spellbinding voyage, Diego sat down one day at a computer to review the photographs of his own brushstrokes. There was no uniform style. In some cases, he had opted for almost naturalistic landscapes, depicting the jungle or even a cabin where he had stayed or lunchroom that he had eaten at for a few days. Other works approached fantastic art: over the buildings floated mythological beings, not necessarily originally from the area in question, but the product of readings or stories someone had shared with him along the way. In other cases, music materialized in the strokes, becoming color and running through the composition making the space vibrate, like Munch's scream that makes the bridge and the sky around the figure undulate. It was not Yturbe's intention to do an aesthetic exploration through an expressionist, realist or symbolic style; he simply let his colors flow responding to a need to express himself. Once he had reviewed his stock of watercolors, he also looked at the photographs of the people he had met in different places and, almost like in a game, he began to paste people's silhouettes on the scene of the places they came from. Using technology, Yturbe developed these digital graphics that reinserted his friends into his voyage, in the watercolors of their homes, their businesses, their churches or their landscapes. His works are true digitalized collages and, in an intelligent, lively manner, comply with the definition of one of this genre's most assiduous practitioners, the surrealist Max Ernst, who said, "The collage is a hypersensitive, scrupulously exact tool, similar to a seismograph, capable of registering the precise possibilities of a human being's being happy at any given moment." ■■■

## VARANASI, INDIA



April 2, 2004. Varanasi, India.  
Swami Dayenanda. Dayenanda is a holy man of Rishikesh. I noticed him from the very first day that he arrived in Varanasi. He told me that he had come to teach his knowledge and that he was the only one who could transmit the Shakti Pat through his gaze. The Shakti Pat is the awakening of Kundalini: the sleeping energy. He explained to me that if I accepted, I could not speak to him again and he would charge me 25 rupees and a piece of fruit for each session. For ten days, two hours a day, we sat facing each other, looking into each other's eyes. On the tenth

day, he decided to go to Kumba Mella with no explanation. I did not know if he had transmitted everything to me, something or nothing. He gave me great peace and I remember him as a ball of energy with eyes, melded with everything around him.

## KAHATAGASPIHILIYA, MIHINTALE, SRI LANKA

February 12, 2004. Kahatagaspiliya, Mihintale, Sri Lanka. Mustapha and family.  
Mustapha is the guard at the Mihintale archaeological site where Mahinda, son of King Ashoka of India, introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Mustapha offered to let me stay in his home. His family, almost only women, and one little boy, waited for him anxiously. When they saw me come in with him, they all went into the kitchen and put on their veils. I tried to convince him to let them eat with us, but, with no success. However, little by little they came out of the kitchen to spend time with us. But they ate nothing. They did not take off their veils. They only watched, murmuring, whispering and laughing.





## BENITO JUÁREZ, OAXACA, MEXICO

November 20, 2004.  
Casa de Piedra, Benito Juárez, Sierra Norte, Oaxaca, Mexico. The Hernández Hernández family. This is one of the few families that has resisted falling into the trap of the "American Dream." They have managed to find alternatives to make better use of their surroundings and not break with their cultural heritage, like with eco-tourism. They make

their living from the land, from a lunchroom managed by Elizabeth and Aunt Licha, and from a guest home where visitors from all over the world stay. This is my refuge in Oaxaca, my family that I have known for years, and they always welcome me with open arms. Thanks to them, I live in Oaxaca.

## HAVANA, CUBA

January 1, 2004. Havana, Cuba.

Fran and Milady. Fran is a driver for the Mexican embassy;

Milady is a housewife and a doctor. I lived with them for a week. For New Years Eve dinner, Milady made lobsters that cost her U.S.\$50, the equivalent of five months wages.

This was possible because Fran, who works for a foreign government, earns 50 times more than other professionals.





GOLDEN TEMPLE,  
AMRITSAR, INDIA

June 28, 2004. Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab, India. Charanjot and Livsharan. Also known as Darbar Sahib, the Golden Temple is the heart of the Sikh faith. The gurus receive thousands of visitors daily from all different religions, beliefs and castes, giving them free room and board. Charanjot and Livsharan are the temple photographers. I met them one morning washing down the marble hallways. They say that since they

began working in the sanctuary, their disreputable lives changed completely. Reading the teachings of Guru Nanak, meditating, praying, singing, working for others and taking a bath every day in the "Nectar Tank", they leave no room for doubt that their souls are on the way to purification.

LEH, LADHAK, INDIA

July 9, 2004. Leh, Ladhak, India. Lamas during a festival and little Muslim girls with the Koran.

Leh, also known as "Little Tibet," is a high desert valley situated between the Himalayas and the Karakoram. The landscape looks like the moon. Although the town is completely militarized because of the proximity of China, today, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs live together peacefully. The town is a living concert of the calls of the Imman to Salat, of the Buddhist and Hindu pygas (a kind of popular religious ceremony or festival), and of the songs of the Sikhs.






## BESAL, PAKISTAN

June 9, 2004. Besal, Pakistan. Abdul Musan, Abrad, Rabee, Basharat, Tammam and Muhammed Elah Usman. They live three months of the year in the Himalayas at an altitude of 4,000 meters. They raise cattle and mine for precious stones. At night, wolves circled us and, deeper into winter, snow leopards, too. They put me up for a week.

To eat, we had to go to the river to fish for trout. We roamed the mountains together. They taught me to pray the Salat: LAA ELAAHA ELLA ALLAH MUHAMMAD RUSULULA!

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