

# A POETICS OF THE EARTH

LUIS-FERNANDO  
SUÁREZ



MAY / JULY



Fotografía: Bosco Wang

Luis Fernando Suárez, a Colombian Canadian contemporary artist, has stood out in the art scene thanks to his unique technique and style. Born in Bogotá in 1971, Suárez has established his career in Canada after immigrating in 1997.

The medium he uses for the creation of his works is very particular, as he employs a technique composed of compound medium (plaster), acrylics, inks, and various materials on canvas, linen, and wood surfaces. This technique allows Suárez to create textures that reveal cracks on the surface of his works, an essential characteristic of his art.

Regarding his artistic vision, Suárez focuses on issues that are relevant to society, such as the human, political, environmental, and social aspects. For him, his art is a tool to communicate and reflect on these issues, and he seeks to impact the viewer with his message.

The artist's work, according to his own testimony, focuses on the formation of the viewer, seeking to awaken a curiosity that transcends the mere aesthetic aspect of the works and fosters a reflective sense. It is about raising public awareness about the individual responsibility that each one possesses in their actions, and how these can affect the environment that surrounds us, thus generating greater awareness towards our surroundings and the need to preserve them.

He is currently based in the city of Montreal, Quebec.



*Quilt in Yellows, 2021-2022*  
Tondo Diameter 182.88 cm x 3.81 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

# A POETICS OF THE EARTH

By **André Seleanu (AICA)**

The work of Luis-Fernando Suárez exudes a strange silence. His paintings have a massive, majestic, and unitary aspect, and yet their silence is “animated” because the pictorial surface, which contains a limited number of colors, is traversed by waves or frozen streams, stopped in their progression. Viewed from another angle, the fields of waves can also embody mountain ridges separated by valleys giving an impression of depth. The plastic material solidified in a certain position induces a sensation of silence, an eloquent silence, because upon closer examination, these paintings possess symbolic meaning. We may investigate the nature of the constituents that this symbolism brings together.

The artist is a child of the Colombian Altiplano, the high plateaus that lie below three very long more or less parallel mountain chains forming the Colombian segment of the Andes. These are recent tectonic mountains, considering a geological timescale, punctuated by volcanic peaks that periodically erupt because the earth’s crust is still relatively thin in these regions. We are referring to the Pacific Ring of Fire, with its Colombian active volcanoes: Nevado de Huila, Galeras, Puracé, El Escondido... In neighboring Ecuador, we find the famous and revered Chimborazo. The Andean soil is periodically shaken by powerful earthquakes. Subjected to these movements, to the sliding of tectonic plates, the earth’s crust has been folding for the duration of geological eras, and has created the majestic Andes. (The Cristóbal Colón peak on the Caribbean coast reaches 5775 meters) From the sky, we are watching silent and immobile seas of mountains, which both approach and move away from each other, but the deep geology, the lava, does remain in a state of turmoil. The silence of mountainous areas speaks to us of energy, of chaos beneath the surface - and especially of mystery.

Luis-Fernando Suárez’s artistic techniques produce certain effects on the pictorial material that evoke the boiling, arrested flow of lava that forged the Andes. His paintings-sculptures are sensors of silence, which trace the past theater of geological birth. Calm and restfulness descend upon him, who open up to the contemplation of these visionary images.



*Angel Falls - Venezuela, 2019*

182.88 x 142 cm

Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Human Impact on the Sea - A World on the Brink*, 2018-2020  
139.7 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Border*, 2020-2021  
139.7 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

## Amidst Contradictions...

In fact, Luis-Fernando Suárez's pictorial expression or sculpted paintings, are situated at the intersection of several visions, his symbolism serving multiple aims, evoked in part by the artist's discourse. The tension between antinomic qualities, such as deep silence and geological chaos, generates a coalescence of various ideas in the spectator. In the context of contradictions, Suárez continually explores and seeks synthesis. The cracks and crevices that run across the finished surfaces of his works suggest to him the wrinkles that traverse faces, and more generally, the effect of human experience. "I extensively use plaster because when it becomes dry, it is better at rendering the effect of fissures than any other material," explains Suárez. As for me, I detected in these irregular cracks the watershed of a river or canal, so crucial in irrigation in pre-Columbian Andean cultures. It is the energy and polysemy of the symbol, as opposed to the poverty of meaning of the sign - whose field of references is limited - that gives the symbol its artistic vitality. The function of the symbol is revelatory. It is a visible reality that invites us to discover invisible domains and encourages us to draw closer to them.

"I am part of something greater than myself," Suárez explains. "My family and kin are farmers. I was raised near the mountains: in the case of my art, it is informed by the Earth." Suárez is quite laconic by nature, but in evaluating the artist and his work, it is evident that he expresses a conception of the Whole, and one can assume that the cosmovision of his indigenous ancestors, the Chibcha and Muisca peoples, has much to do with it. Other indigenous peoples of the Altiplano, the Tegua, who became extinct in the nineteenth century, were great connoisseurs of the medicinal properties of plants, a legacy that even now is actively used and lived on a daily basis on the great Andean plateaus. Syncretism, the veneration of the Earth and the Cosmos, underlie indigenous spiritualities.

In the Muisca religion, Bagué (the Great Mother) is the immaterial principle of creation: she possesses the will and imagination of all things to come. (This corresponds to the Chinese Tao, which also underlies a unitary and cosmic vision of the natural world.) In fact, a departmental capital city a few hours away from Bogotá is called Ibagué, in homage to the venerable pre-Columbian goddess. I make the connection between the holistic sense of this spiritual heritage and the ecology exuded in the work of Luis-Fernando Suárez, especially in his more recent work, initiated around 2017. One of the many messages of the artist's symbolism is that the Earth must be respected by man as a sacred totality.



*Oro - Objects of Conflict, 2019*

25.4 x 30.48 x 2.54 cm

Acrylic, ink, Kevlar and plaster on Ceramic Plate



*Pompeii - Nostalgia del Pasado, 2018 - 2019*  
88.9 x 88.9 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Blue #1, Quilt Series, 2020*  
182.88 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

## A premonitory sense

Suárez's global and ecological vision gives large scope to political and social issues, which he addresses through his painting and his sculpted painting. The artist is bluntly warning us that "we are destroying the planet." The approach is subtle and far from being strident, it develops the stance of the heart in the calm manner characterizing Suárez and his art. The Twin Towers (2001), a premonitory and alarming painting created shortly before the catastrophe of the New York World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, presents a relatively thin impasto in ochre and red tones. Dramatically, it brings us to think and to be concerned about the diffuse threats of the present. The Colombian civil war that has continued for decades, with its ruthless actors and staggering misdeeds, forms the subject of Fosas Comunes (Mass Graves, 2009-2010), a monumental painting in a prevailing dark blue tone, vertically deployed, with long parallel niches set in lightly sculpted plaster covered with a very smooth varnish. The work is haunted by tragedy, yet it manifests itself gently. I am also impressed by the rhythmic, balanced structure of the plastic space.

Luis-Fernando Suárez chose to settle in Canada in 1997, leaving behind the violence of the civil war. In his new country he practiced several professions, including that of real estate agent, and reached some material security. However, his true vocation remained painting. He adapted to the new land, discovered society and studied art in Montreal. At the beginning of his artistic journey, Luis-Fernando Suárez's painting can be assimilated to abstract expressionism, such as in the case of the Twin Towers. One may note the monochromatic tendency and the almost flat surface, but soon he is adding a third dimension that he confronts. He continues to explore, discover, and adapt various mediums to his aims, identifying ways to work with pictorial matter, finding out techniques, and subjects.

Suárez creates his own personal method, which is related to other trajectories of informal and matiériste art, i.e. art that moves away from the academic traditions of art schools. He uses gel and plaster, which he kneads in very gestural, physical work. His hands are his main tools. It is an authentic process, which can be identified as process art, with or without the presence of onlookers. The process possesses a form of autonomy that allows a crucial place for chance or randomness. The support of burlap or wood board is laid flat on the ground. The color is added to the gel which will be kneaded and pressed onto the support, or depending on the desired effect, it is applied once the pictorial and sculptural material is dried.

During the drying process, networks of cracks appear in the dried plaster, fissures that the artist compares to the wrinkles on a face marked by the experience of life. Often, during the birthing of the artwork, the artist seizes the support base, no matter how large or unwieldy it may be, he shakes it, and strikes the floor with it, while the force of gravity also does its job. Undulations occur in the wet gel, which are preserved at the end of the drying process that may last for days.



*Massacre of The Innocents II, 2016*

121.92 x 91.44 cm

Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Changements Climatiques, 2017*  
35.56 x 45.72 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Ostium Fluminis, 2023*  
35.56 x 45.72 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas





*Divine Comedie*, 2017  
35.56 x 45.72 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Continente Antártico*, 2019  
182.88 x 139.7 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

## The Memory of the Cordilleras

This is how the sculptural third dimension of the impasto manages to suggest the mountainous expanses of the Andes in Colombia. The artistic creation simulates in some way the folding of the earth's crust with its crests and ridges, eruptions, and earthquakes. The work symbolizes the memory of the three cordilleras. "For me, each object that I produce is unique, it has its own reality like life," explains the artist. Like Antoni Tàpies, the famous Catalan representative of *pintura matérica*, the materiality of the work transcends its state in order to evoke an analysis of the human condition, and in Suárez's case, in a holistic manner, a sense of unity of matter-geology-spirit, which absorbs the meaning of Chibcha and Muisca spirituality. "Suárez would like the viewer to both feel and reflect. (...) The rather dark palette adds to the feeling of nature and earth, of something slowly being born, gradually freeing itself from the constraints of matter. While one work resembles a natural structure, another looks like a gigantic ancient Chinese symbol eroded by time, barely visible under a thick layer of mixed techniques. It undulates under a golden sheath, in motion, changing shape with every gaze." (1) The author is referring to the work entitled *Civilization 2011-2015* (72 inches by 96 inches, mixed media)

The art of Luis-Fernando Suárez manifests itself in its complexity, its subtlety, in *Les Jardins de Giverny* (2017), where the sculpted thickness of the work and a disconcerting chromaticism playing on black and green hues, are of the essence. We know that Monet's private garden is an archetypal symbol of nature transformed into art. It takes courage to approach this theme: Suárez is not simply referential, but he actually creates on this theme. It should be noted that the titles of his paintings are important: they are gateways to abstract works. The symbolism of this work is captivating and typical of the artist's approach: the folds can evoke the undulation of an ocean floor, or even of mountain ranges and peaks.

Suárez's images offer a great wealth of textures that result from the technique he has developed, and using monochrome schemes of one or two colors, they present various degrees of matte and luster, parameters he likes to vary. As for the process of kneading and applying the gel for his large works, Suárez can be linked to the *matiériste* tradition, of which painter Bernard Dubuffet has been a practitioner and theorist. It is a question of the atypical treatment of the pictorial support. Dubuffet conceives art as a creative process, which the viewer can follow and even participate in by seeing and feeling the result. "(...) A whole internal mechanism must be set in motion in the viewer, he scratches where the painter has scratched, rubs, digs, masticates where the painter has done so. Of all the gestures made by the painter, he knows how to reproduce them within himself. Where colors have occurred, he experiences the viscous movement of the paste driven by gravity; where bursts have occurred, he bursts out with them. Where the surface has wrinkled as it dries, he too dries, contracts and wrinkles, and if a blister has formed, he feels the swelling growing in the most intimate part of his belly." (2)



*Divine Comedie - Purgatoire, 2017*

45.72 x 35.56 cm

Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Fireworks - 2 panels, 2019*  
182.88 x 487.68 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*The North American ice storm of January 1998, 2020*  
121.92 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Pompei II, 2016*  
35.56 x 53.34 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

## Anselm Kiefer's vision

The works of Anselm Kiefer, an influential contemporary German artist, are also saturated with matter and they are monumental, using materials such as sand, earth, soot, chalk, ruins, and waste. "The spirit that dwells in the material is also important," Kiefer remarked. His references are openly historical, philosophical and literary. He explicitly questions the origins of the German tradition, such as the Battle of Teutoburg Forest, where German warlord Arminius defeated the Roman legions (9 AD); the legend of Parsifal and the Nibelungenlied, and tries to come to terms with the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust, and interprets the Kabbalah, an important influence in his work. "My biography is the biography of Germany," he explains. In 2013, Kiefer presented his work entitled *Alkahest* at the Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul de Vence, as part of the exhibition "The Adventures of Truth: Painting and Philosophy, a Narrative," organized by philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy. "Kiefer is no longer competing with God, but with geology. But it's geology in motion. (...)

The painter-geologist who competes with the alchemists, that is to say, with people who, with their sacred formulas, their retorts, and the balances on which they weigh salt and sulfur, elements and counter-elements, and from there, shapes and anti-forms, themselves competed, during the Middle Ages in general, and the Jewish Middle Ages in particular, with the God who leads all things, the God who metamorphoses them and, when necessary, resurrects them." (3)

If there is a Great Spirit in Suárez's work, it is implicit in his action of kneading and letting gravity act on the pictorial and sculptural material, in a way adopting a subtle and humble attitude. His gesture is one of exploration and it is not an explicit commentary, or an open dialogue between the arts. He internalizes geology and volcanism, in a very personal form of spirituality. It is difficult in this case to speak of religion; it is rather a deep respect and identification with the Earth.



*Bushfires - Black Summer in Australia 2019*, 2019  
182.88 x 243.84 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



Blow of mercy, 2010  
121 x 91.44 cm  
Acrylic compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Nostalgie de la future*, 2018  
91.44 x 76.2 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

## New directions

Since 2017, Luis-Fernando Suárez has been exploring new plastic possibilities: he goes for an all-out exploration and develops ecological and political themes. He confronts the effect of two versus three dimensions: color runoff under the force of gravity versus chromatic field and impasto, lightness versus weight, as a visual drama. In *Révolution française*, adopting a form of dark humor, the continuous chromatic zone diagonally cuts across the Arches paper field, like a guillotine blade, and color flows drip under the force of gravity.

“In my work, I like to use all possible mediums,” says the artist. Thus, he creates a series of six small but weighty works, titled *Objects of Conflict*: blue symbolizes water, the coffee color represents oil, red represents the Catholic religion, and yellow represents gold. The material simulates the heavy protective armor of police officers, made of ceramic lined with Kevlar.

The concern for global warming is evident in two large, sculpted paintings titled *The Arctic* and *The Antarctic*, masses of white and blue tones of colored gel placed at the center of large canvases (96 by 72 inches) that simultaneously give a sense of fear and pity in the face of the accelerated melting of ice caps, to the point that in *The Antarctic*, giant stretches of ice are detaching from the continental ice mass.

“Incendios forestales: Verano Negro / Bushfires - Black Summer in Australia 2019” (2019) is a work in this vein that denounces the effect of drought in Australia in 2019, when 180,000 square kilometers of bush and forest were destroyed by fire, with millions of wildlife casualties. The masses of yellowish-toned ice capture the drought very well. In “*La Frontera / The Border*” (2019), a curved ochre and red belt runs through fields of mustard, green and brown, in a heavily textured work, symbolizing the border that separates the United States from Mexico, the First World from the Third World, with the violence and suffering that this political geography can engender.

“*Human Impact on the Sea - A World on the Brink*” (2018-2020), with its beautiful dark green and blue tones, denounces the intervention of mining companies that carry out devastating drilling in the depths of the sea, contributing to the destruction of the Earth.

Luis-Fernando Suárez continues to explore the possibilities of this art that art critic Michel Tapié called “*l’art autre*,” art that breaks away from the beaten paths of academia, that plays with matter and space: it already has a venerable history behind it, with representatives such as Alberto Burri or Lucio Fontana. An expression created under the influence of the unconscious, or even what the Greeks called the individual daimon, a force that accompanies and protects us.



*Región Ártica, 2019*  
182.88 x 121.92 cm

Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas

The Latin philosopher Apuleius of Madauros (c. 125-170 AD) wrote in a small treatise entitled "On the God of Socrates": "There are intermediate divinities that live between the heights of the sky and the earthly element, in a milieu occupied by the air, and who transmit our desires to the gods (...) The Greeks called them daemons. Messages of prayers and benefits between men and gods (...) on one side the requests, on the other the aid; interpreters with some, helpful genii with others." (4)

The artist is guided by the spontaneity of his daimôn, a self-conceived aspect that obeys its own program. In fact, "painting becomes a subtle machine for conveying philosophy" (5) in this somatization of thought that constitutes Luis-Fernando Suárez's tactile art, which characterizes his latest creative period. The multiplicity of meanings that the daimôn allows, the fertility of symbolism, are evolving in the direction of unity and complexity.



*Brutalistic Painting, 2017*  
35.56 x 45.72 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Transcendence II, 2018*  
142.24 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas





*The Three Graces, Hommage a Rubens, 2021*  
139.7 x 182.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Ego, Series -Structure, 2022*  
40.64 x 50.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Stability (Beige) - Series - Structure, 2022*  
40.64 x 50.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Superego, Series - Structure, 2022*  
40.64 x 50.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Deseos e Impulsos / Desires and Impulses- Series - Structure, 2021*  
40.64 x 50.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*id: Primitive, instinctual, 2022*  
40.64 x 50.88 cm  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Dreamcatcher - L'Origine, 2022*  
Tondo Diameter 121.92 cm x 3.81 depth  
Acrylic, compound-plaster and ink on canvas



*Petroleum - Objects of Conflict Series, 2019*  
30.48 x 25.4 x 1.9 cm  
Acrylic, ink, Kevlar and plaster on Ceramic Plate

## BIO

André Seleanu for the Luis-Fernando Suárez catalog

A Montreal-based art curator, author, art critic and journalist, André Seleanu contributes to Canadian and international visual arts publications, including *Vie des Arts* and *Canadian Art*. André Seleanu's writings span the various periods of art. In 2021, he published *Understanding Contemporary Art with Mots en toile* (Montreal) and in a related release *Le Conflit de l'art contemporain L'Harmattan* (Paris). The author analyzes the considerable differences between postmodernism or contemporary art and the artistic movements that preceded it. The author is interested in artistic themes, as well as social and environmental ones, with a predilection for Latin America, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, etc.

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(1) Dorota Kozinska *Emergence of the Self Paintings Exhibition Catalogue* Galerie Han Art Montreal, Canada, 2017

(2) Jean Dubuffet cited by André Seleanu in *Understanding Contemporary Art*, *Mots en toile* Editions Montreal 2021, p. 187

(3) Bernard-Henri Lévy catalog *Adventures of Truth* Maeght Foundation, 2013

(4) "De Deo Socratis," in *ApuleiPlatoniciMadaurensis Opera quaesupersunt*, Volume III, de philosophialibri, De Gruyter (ISBN 978-3-11-096634-3, lire en ligne [archive]).

(5) J. Dubuffet, *Prospectus et autres écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, t. II, p. 21

## LUIS-FERNANDO SUÁREZ

Born in Bogota, Colombie, 1971 / Né à Bogotá, en Colombie, 1971  
Living in Montréal, Québec, Canada since 1997 / Réside Vivre à Montréal, Québec, Canada depuis 1997

### Exhibitions / Expositions

- 2023** La poética de la tierra– Individual Exhibition, Seminario de Cultura Mexicana, Mexico City  
**2023** Petit et Intime – Group Exhibition, Belgo Building, Galerie Espace 531, Montréal, Canada  
**2023** Nuit Blanche, Belgo Building, Galerie Espace 230, Morphologie de Plantes, Montréal, Canada  
**2022** Galerie Espace 230, Remixed / Media V, Montréal, Canada  
**2021** Salon des Independents V, Montréal, Canada  
**2021** Galerie Espace 230, Off Papier : en marge de la Foire, Montréal, Canada  
**2021** Galerie Espace 230, Salon des Independents III, Montréal, Canada  
**2020** Nuit Blanche, Belgo Building, Montréal, Canada  
**2020** Salon de Refusés, Galerie McBride, Montréal, Canada  
**2018** Galerie Luz, Montréal, Canada  
**2017** Galerie Han Art, Montréal, Canada  
**2009** Galerie Han Art, Montréal, Canada  
**2005** Semaine Culturelle Colombienne, UQAM, Montréal, Canada  
**2004** Fondation El Muro Antiguo, Bogota, Colombie  
**2004** Chambre de Commerce de Bogota, **ESPACES**, Bogotá, Colombie  
**2004** Chambre de Commerce de Montreal, **Semaine Collectif d'Art à Montréal**, Canada  
**2004** Galerie la Vitrine, Collectif, **MICRO-CLIMAT** Montréal, Canada  
**2003** Galerie La Vitrine, Collectif **TWIN TOWERS BLUES**, Montréal, Canada  
**2003** Galerie La Vitrine, **Individuel**, Montréal, Canada  
**2001** La Espiral Rota, Collectif, Montréal, Canada  
**2001** Sutton Immobilia Galerie Outremont, **Individuel**, Outremont, Canada  
**2001** Festivalísimo, **La Muestra ONF National Office film**, Montréal, Canada  
**Semaine Culturelle Colombienne**, Centre Cultural Mc Gill University Montréal, Canada  
**2000** Sutton Immobilia, **Individuel**, Outremont, Canada  
**1999** Centre Etudes UQAM, Montréal, Canada

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**2002 "Découvrir une tradition. Jeunesse Colombienne - Formes et couleurs"**  
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**VIE DES ARTS**. No.192 (85) Septembre 2003, Bernard Levy.

**2004** Couverture. **LIBERTÉ**.  
**La poesía tiene la palabra**. No. 261. Sept 2003, Patrick Lafontaine

### Collections Publics

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**CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE DE MONTREAL METROPOLITAIN**, Montréal Canada  
**DEVELOPPEMENT URBAIN**, Montréal Canada  
**CANADIAN HOSPITAL**, Bogota, Colombie  
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