



THE ALCHEMY OF THE HEART

Where the Body Becomes Territory

ARI DE LA MORA

THE PROJECT

*When does
the body
become a
territory?*

Developed over four years, *The Alchemy of the Heart* is a multidisciplinary portrait series exploring the body as a territory shaped by identity, memory, transformation, loss, and resilience.

At the centre of the project are thirteen oil portraits, each developed through a personal encounter and the story of the person portrayed. Symbolic elements drawn from their experiences transform each portrait into a visual territory—revealing what the body carries, remembers, protects, and becomes.

The paintings extend beyond the painted surface through moving-image works and original sound, creating another layer through which each story can be experienced.

Rooted in portraiture and storytelling, *The Alchemy of the Heart* brings together thirteen individual experiences while tracing a larger question:

When does the body become a territory?

Created with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

THE WORKS

Territory of Becoming

*Thirteen portraits.
Thirteen territories.*



03

TERRITORY OF BECOMING
Ari De La Mora
Oil on wood panel · 36 × 36 in
91.4 × 91.4 cm

THE WORKS



Territory of Return — Ely



Territory of Transition — Romero



Territory of Breath — Carolina



Territory of Inheritance — Veronika



Territory of Divergence — Mich



Territory of Reconstruction — Paloma

Oil on wood panel · 36 × 36 in (91.4 × 91.4 cm) each

THE WORKS



Territory of Displacement — Jess



Territory of Visibility — Nora



Territory of Matriarchy — Michelle



Territory of Movement — Salomé



Territory of Continuance — Raquel



Territory of Ritual — Lulu

Oil on wood panel · 36 × 36 in (91.4 × 91.4 cm) each

SELECTED STORIES

ARI

Territory of Becoming



I decided to paint myself only at the very end. I had never planned to be part of the series, but after years of painting the stories of others while moving through infertility, pregnancy loss, and motherhood, I realized my own story belonged among theirs.

The painting holds the roots and veins of that journey: the circle of blood and life that connected me to my first pregnancy and its loss, the darkness of grief, and the possibility of hope.

Ultimately, I painted the alchemy of becoming a mother.

ELY

Territory of Return



Ely identifies as an Afro-Mexican woman. Her family comes from a coastal town in southern Mexico, where the ocean has long been part of family life, memory, and identity.

Afro-Mexican communities have lived in Mexico for centuries, yet their formal recognition in the Mexican Constitution came only in 2019. That distance between presence and recognition became an important part of the portrait.

Ely's story became one of return—not necessarily to a place, but to heritage, visibility, and belonging.

SELECTED STORIES

Jess — Territory of Displacement

Jess is a Zapotec Mexican-Canadian woman who was adopted as a baby by Canadian missionary parents. Growing up in the Langley area, often as the only brown Indigenous girl around her, she carried a persistent sense of not fully belonging.

Her birth mother died giving birth to her at fourteen years old. Years later, Jess returned to Oaxaca, began learning Spanish, and started reconnecting with her Mexican and Zapotec identity.

Today, she works as a doula and early childhood educator. Her territory is one of displacement, but also of return: a search for language, lineage, and a sense of home within herself.



The complete series brings together thirteen portraits and thirteen personal narratives.

FROM ENCOUNTER TO PAINTING

Each portrait began with an encounter: conversation, listening, photography, and time together. The reference image was never a template. Through research, drawing, symbolism, and painting, each sitter's presence became a territory shaped by memory, identity, landscape, and lived experience.



Encounter / reference photograph



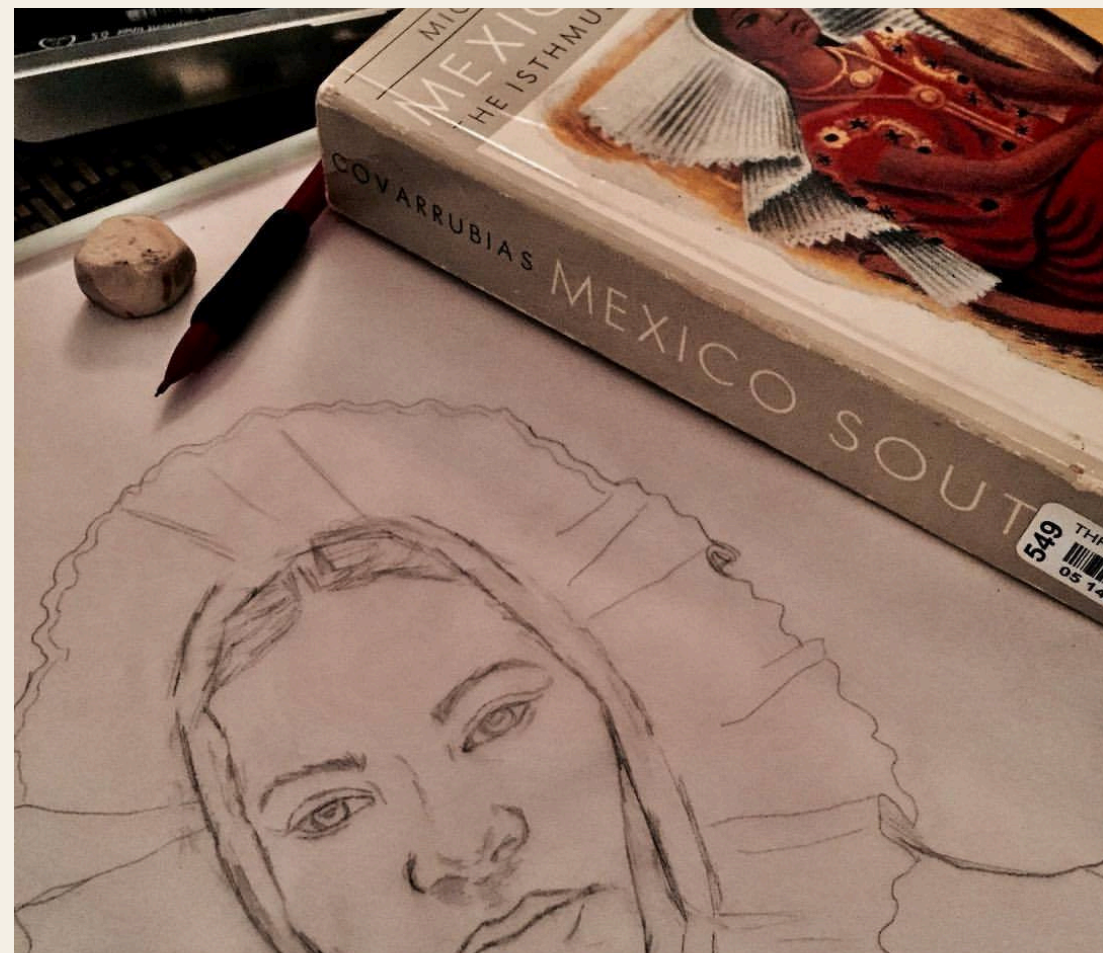
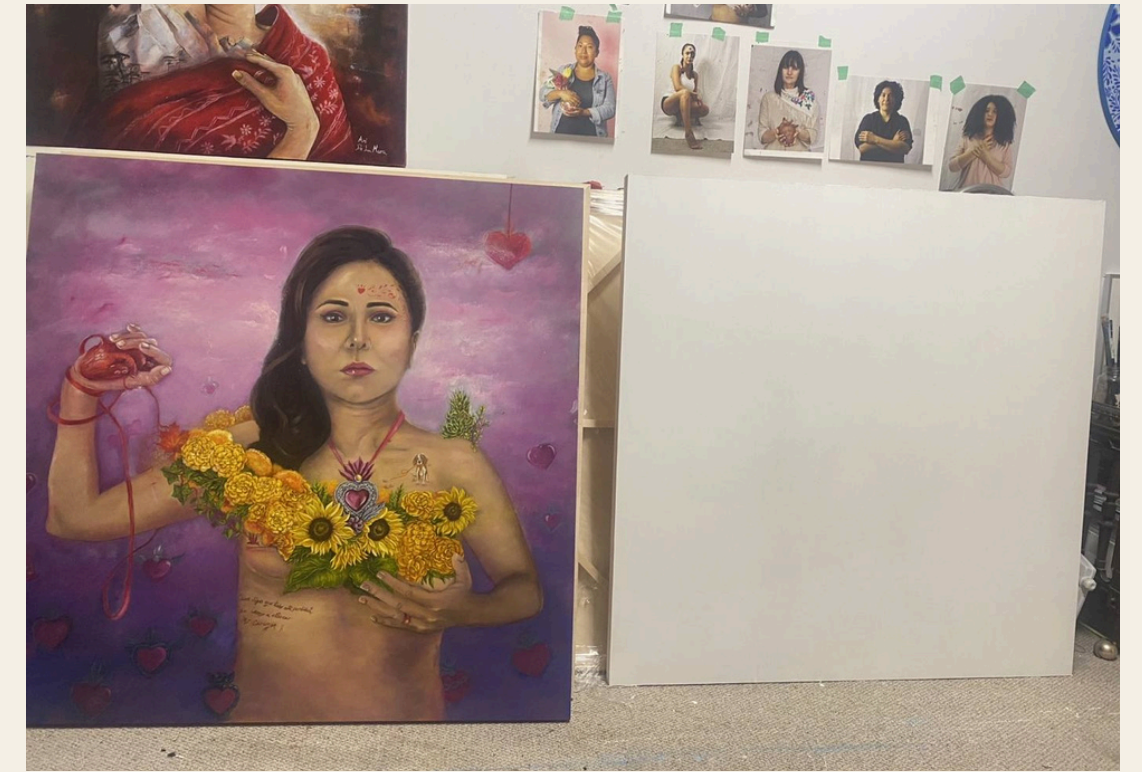
Research and drawing



Finished painting

A gesture remains. The geography changes.

PROCESS



The paintings developed slowly through research, drawing, photography, symbolic associations, and experimentation.

Rather than following a fixed method, each portrait found its own visual language through the story of the person portrayed.

Drawing became a way of thinking.

Painting became a way of translating.

MOVING IMAGE + SOUND

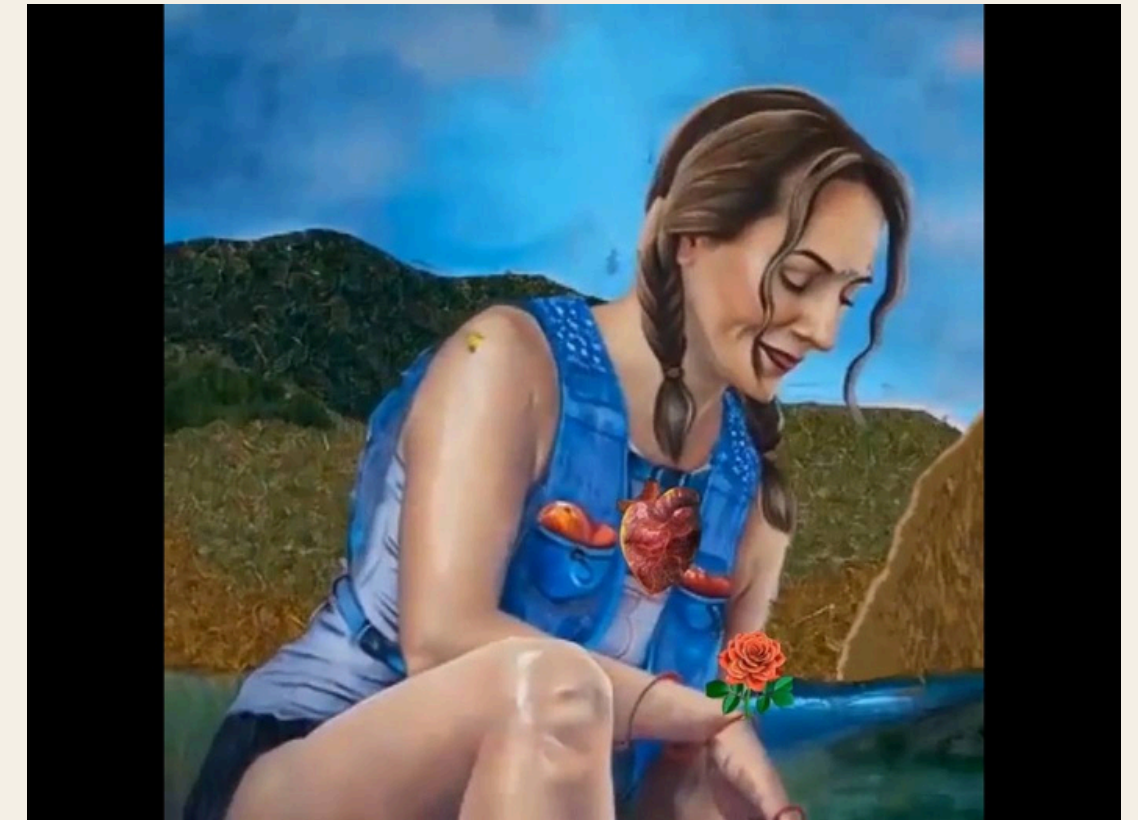
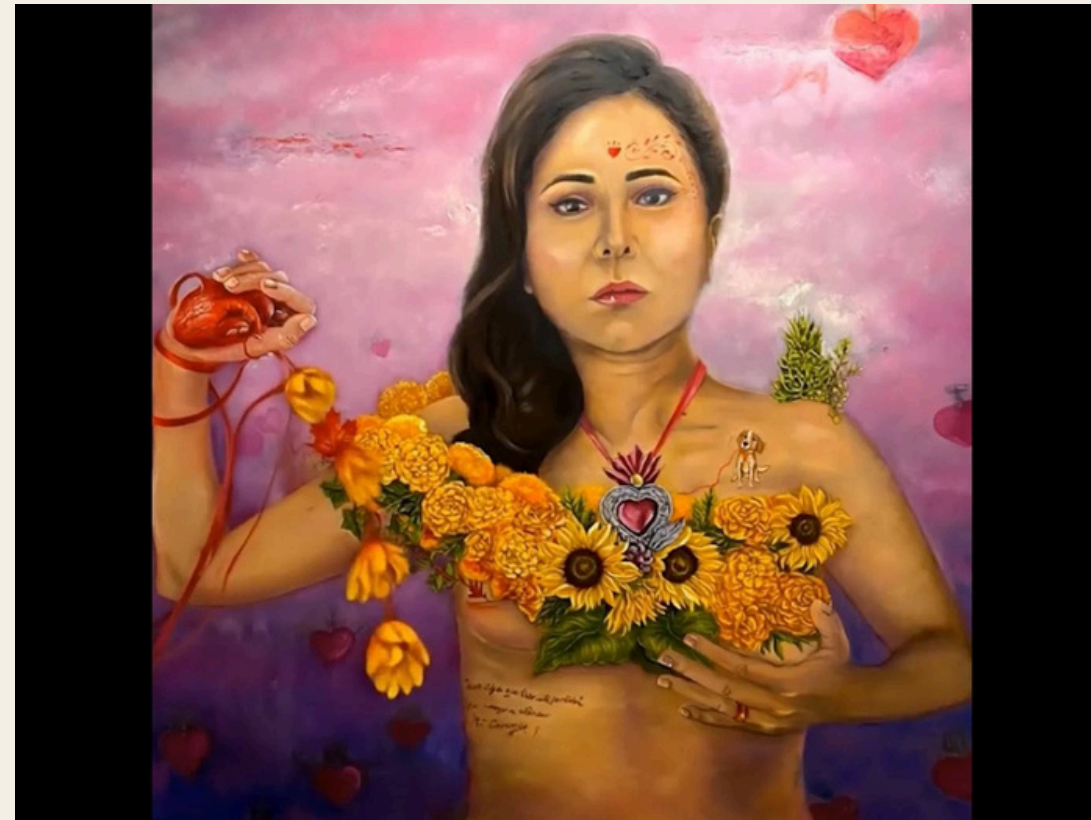
Painting into time



The painted portraits extend into subtle moving-image works developed in collaboration with animation artist **Tarcila Neves**, accompanied by original sound compositions by **Rodrigo García**.

Elements within the paintings shift, emerge, and transform, extending the symbolic language of each portrait into movement and time.

MOVING IMAGE + SOUND



The moving-image works can exist in dialogue with the original paintings or be presented independently through projection, allowing the project to adapt to different exhibition environments and scales.

[WATCH THE EXHIBITION TRAILER →](#)

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community conversation connected to The Alchemy of the Heart, 2022.

The Alchemy of the Heart was developed through conversation as much as through painting. The personal narratives at the centre of the project open possibilities for public programming around migration, identity, representation, motherhood, loss, cultural inheritance, transformation, and belonging.

CONVERSATION AS PART OF THE PROCESS

During the development of the project, De La Mora organized a women-centred conversation at the Consulate General of Mexico in Vancouver, bringing together members of the community - including participants portrayed in the series - to discuss migration, representation, visibility, and the experiences of Latin American women in Canada.

This history of dialogue creates a foundation for programming that can be developed in response to each presenting institution and its communities.

PROGRAMMING POSSIBILITIES



CONVERSATION

ARTIST TALKS + CONVERSATIONS

Artist talks and moderated conversations can explore the themes within individual portraits, the development of the project, and the relationship between traditional painting and AI-assisted animation. A collaborative conversation with animation artist Tarcila Neves can address the translation of physical paintings into moving image.



WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOPS + PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMMING

Workshops can be developed around storytelling, portraiture, memory, migration, identity, and representation. De La Mora's previous community-based practice includes creative programming with Latin American immigrant youth and women.



COMMUNITY

SCREENINGS + CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS

The moving-image component creates possibilities for screenings, film pairings, panels, and interdisciplinary programming. The exhibition can also create opportunities for partnerships with Vancouver-based Latin American cultural organizations, festivals, artists, and community groups.

EXHIBITION FORMAT + TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

PAINTINGS

13 original oil paintings on wood panel
36 × 36 in (91.4 × 91.4 cm) each

MOVING IMAGE

13 animated works developed from the original paintings. The animations can be presented through projection within the gallery environment, individually or in selected sequences, depending on the scale and configuration of the venue.

SOUND

Original sound compositions accompany the moving-image works. Audio presentation can be adapted to the acoustic requirements of the venue.

PROJECTION + SPACE

The project is best suited to spaces that can accommodate the paintings alongside large-scale projected imagery. Projection surfaces may include gallery walls or other architectural surfaces appropriate to the installation.

PUBLIC ART POTENTIAL

The moving-image component can also extend beyond the traditional gallery environment. Selected animations may be adapted for large-scale architectural projection and temporary public-art presentations, subject to site-specific technical assessment.

CONCEPTUAL INSTALLATION VISUALIZATION

AI-generated image for spatial reference only. It does not depict the original artworks or an actual installation.





ABOUT THE ARTIST

ARI DE LA MORA

Ari De La Mora is a Mexican-Canadian visual artist based in Vancouver, whose practice explores identity, memory, migration, cultural inheritance, and the body through portraiture and storytelling.

Working primarily in painting and public art, her work combines figurative imagery with symbolic elements drawn from Mexican visual culture, personal histories, and the lived experiences of the people she portrays.

Her practice has developed across studio painting, large-scale murals, community-based projects, and multidisciplinary collaborations.

The Alchemy of the Heart extends this work into moving image and sound, bringing portraiture into a multidisciplinary and adaptable exhibition format.

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

Shadbolt Centre for the Arts

Artist Residency

La Lotería

PechaKucha Burnaby

Featured Artist Speaker

Making a Life as an Immigrant Artist

Consulate General of Mexico in Vancouver

Exhibitions & Cultural Programming

Granville Island Cultural Society

International Day of the Dead

Three-year multidisciplinary
cultural project and publication

Vancouver Mural Festival & Women Who Paint

Vancouver · Etobicoke, Toronto
Public Art / Mural Projects

Canada Council for the Arts

Support for

The Alchemy of the Heart



THE ALCHEMY OF THE HEART

Where the Body Becomes Territory

EXHIBITION · INSTITUTIONAL · PUBLIC ART INQUIRIES

Ari De La Mora · Vancouver, Canada

WATCH THE EXHIBITION TRAILER →

VIEW ARTIST WEBSITE →

CONTACT THE ARTIST →

The Alchemy of the Heart was created with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.