

Alchemy To me, alchemy is magical: it combines different elements, substances, and textures to create something new. It connects the material and emotional worlds.

Alchemy, for me, means working with pigments, different image carriers, and other materials to make ideas visible. The materials change in the process—such as wax, which intensifies colours or gives them new nuances. The alchemists’ experimentation with different elements inspires me to maintain a playful approach to my own work.



Sandra Vásquez de la Horra waxing a work in her studio in Berlin, 2025



Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's altar with Indigenous figures, 2003

Altar An altar, in my eyes, is not something intended for a single deity; rather, it consists of several small things that are important to me. I have many altars in my life, located in various places. An altar can be set up to heal your relationship with your mother and father, or to honour your ancestors, and it reflects your physical origins.

Moreover, an altar can be used to manifest things so that they come to you. It is a portal, an entrance to the dimensions of the gods, the ancestors, or the deceased. If an object carries a special energy, you can sense it and connect with others energetically through your faith.

During my childhood in Chile, we used to collect shells and other items, and we built small altars. It was a very popular game. Encountering gods through altars is a special experience. It enables communication on deep energy levels. By setting up an altar, you imbue a figure with belief and presence—you bring it to life.

Being a Mother Motherhood is a huge gift. Clara is gorgeous. Becoming a mother was a life-changing experience for me. I would say it is the most powerful thing I have ever experienced. The physical transformation that occurs when a life grows inside you is so intense. It was a great symbiosis—a motif that often recurs in my work.

Being a mother is not always easy. But even in difficult moments, there is so much light. It feels like you are no longer walking alone. That feeling is so present—ever since my daughter arrived, I have never walked alone again. It is beautiful. So powerful.

I can understand why a woman might not want to become a mother. I believe in destiny. If you have a child, it is because that child is meant to be there. And that destiny cannot be stopped. The child comes, and everything changes.



El Sueño del Árbol Rojo (The Dream of the Red Tree), 2016

Being a Woman = Becoming a woman.
The soul is neither female nor male.

Birth = Rebirth, being here again.
Every person comes into the world to fulfil a mission. With birth comes the question of what we need to learn in life. If we have not completed our tasks, we do not disappear but come back instead.
I think of it as a kind of chain birth. We meet people in our lives for a reason: to learn, to teach, or to grow together. When I am going through a difficult time with someone, I always ask myself why this is, and what I can learn from the situation.



Altar figure of Guanyin in Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's studio in Berlin, 2025

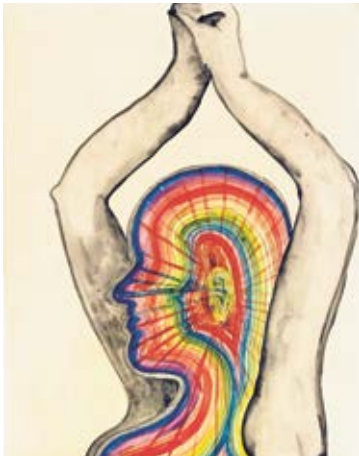
Blood To me, blood symbolizes my spiritual bond with Ochún, a Yoruba goddess with whom I have a deep connection. She is the goddess of rivers, but she is just as strongly connected to blood. Blood plays a central role in my artwork—as a mirror of nature, full of contrasts: it symbolizes both light and shadow.
When I talk about blood, I do not just mean in a biographical sense. In my artistic and spiritual work, I also follow a flow, so to speak. My work *El Sueño del Árbol Rojo* is an example of this.

Body I understand the body as a place of memory.
We store experiences, emotions, and events—even unconscious ones—in our bodies. The body, in my view, is closely connected to nature, because we are a part of everything—and of Pacha Mama. In many Indigenous cultures, she is Mother Earth. If nature is sick, my body cannot be healthy either. The healing of my body is inextricably linked to the healing of nature. Many illnesses arise because we have become alienated from nature. We are part of a vast organism alongside plants, insects, minerals, and all living beings. The healing is the balance with nature.

Botanics *Botánica de la evolución* (Evolutionary Botanics) is a series of pictures that I began in 1997. I collected old illustrations from scientific, botanical, and anatomical books at flea markets, attempting to gain a better visual understanding of the world. How do forms work? And how does evolution work?
In my view, there is no difference between species. I have a theory that we are a part of everything and carry everything within us. I do not believe that we are different from plants or animals. I am convinced that they, too, have souls.
Everything around us is alive—even stones. Materials transform; for example, glass is made from sand. I find these transformations fascinating.

Buddhism After breaking away from my family's Catholic faith, I discovered Buddhism through Tai Chi. I practised it for over ten years, immersing myself deeply in topics such as meditation, karma, and reincarnation. I actually find Buddhism stricter than Catholicism. It offers a special balance and has brought me liberation. Through Buddhism, I have learned a great deal about fate and the balance of energies.
My move to Germany changed my spiritual path. I still meditate, but no longer in a dojo, rather in everyday life. Drawing has become my silent practice. When I draw, I am empty. That is my form of meditation. In this state, I can work for hours without getting tired. In fact, I derive energy from it. If I do not draw for a few days, I lose my inner balance. Drawing helps me to stay centred, which is a principle of Buddhist teaching.

Catholicism Although I was raised Catholic, I distanced myself from that faith at an early age. I perceived this religion as a strategy of power—a method of controlling people. When I was in the first year of primary school, we were supposed to be confirmed, but I was the only one who decided against it. Instead, I found my way to Buddhism.



Soy energía (I Am Energy), 2021

Colour Colour and its effects are deeply rooted in our subconscious. In symbolism, colours are often attributed different meanings than in reality. Colour can be decoded in various ways and thus point beyond what is visible.
Energies and elements can be assigned colours, and in the same way, every person has their own colour aura. This colour plays an important role in our lives. It is a reference to our soul.
In the Yoruba tradition, each colour is assigned to an Orisha. For example, yellow belongs to Ochún, my Orisha. However, my Ochún is not only yellow; it is also green because it is connected to Orunmila, the god of the oracle. My guardian angel Obá is pink or purple. Changó is red and white. Yemayà, the ocean, is blue. These colours are most strongly represented in my aura. Another Orisha connected to me carries the rainbow. So this also appears often in my work. After my initiation in 2003, I stuck very closely to these spiritual colours, severely limiting my colour palette. Later, I returned to a broader spectrum.

Community To me, community means that we can step into the light—even when we do not always succeed. It is about working together to build a better society. I want a fairer world. There are things we cannot achieve alone. When we work together, we can give our lives a deeper meaning.

Community is formed above all through ritual. That is where we connect with each other, learn, and share experiences. I felt this particularly strongly in Buenos Aires this year—a deep, almost magical connection with people. We were on the same wavelength.

During the dictatorship in Chile, I experienced community through important figures such as Lola Hoffmann’s students. Her practice, inspired by Carl Gustav Jung, was revolutionary in our eyes and profoundly impacted us.



La Condena (The Conviction), 2007



Manos arriba (Hands Up), 2009

Communication Communication and language are not the same thing. There are other multisensory ways of communicating. It is the reflection of your own aura in the other person. For example, when you fall in love without speaking the same language, you achieve a different form of perception.

My grandfather, my grandmother’s third husband, had a mental disability. As a small child, he was hit on the head with a metal stick. He had a strong influence on me. No one could really communicate with him—except me. I always found ways to talk to him, even without words. My grandmother was very happy about that. We found our own language, an alternative way of understanding each other.

Desaparecidos *Desaparecidos* (the disappeared) is a term used to describe people who were secretly arrested or kidnapped by the Pinochet regime and then brutally murdered. This period was unimaginably painful for all the families who were unable to bury their children and loved ones. Pinochet’s actions constitute crimes against humanity.

Many people want to forget, but how can they forget if they have no idea where their family members are? If these loved ones remain missing forever? A country that cannot bring justice to its victims will carry this burden for all time. It is a heavy fate.



Aymara, 2025

Earth = Mother
Earth is the material of your being.

Energy I am energy.
There is an infinite source within our bodies that we must recognize in order to access it. We are in a state of constant motion and metamorphosis. In energetic symbiosis with other people, we are in a sense dependent on each other. We nourish ourselves not only physically, but also emotionally and intellectually.

I have felt this connection to the world since an early age. At age seven I experienced my first formative trip to Easter Island; the view into the crater of a dormant volcano and the legends of bird people touched me deeply. Later, as a teenager, I travelled to Brazil, inspired by Jorge Amado’s 1935 novel *Jubiabá*. I was fascinated by its mystical world of the Orishas and even visited the author’s house in Salvador. These journeys initiated and opened me up, sharpening my perception of life’s invisible energies.

Drawing To me, drawing is a form of thinking. It is a way of reflecting on my high sensitivity and of developing theories about the world. For example, I perceive plants as living beings. I feel their soul and see their faces. Plants and trees are spiritual beings with a protective energy. They also purify the world and help it breathe. The Earth itself is our mother, and the forests are her lungs. We are one—there is no separation.

Drawing also helps me explore new concepts. I am currently working with a technique where I interpret stains and discover new shapes in them. Sometimes figures emerge from my imagination, but at other times it is more like channelling—a dialogue with other levels. It is an interplay between imagination and a kind of spiritual communication. If you just stay in your own head, you go round in circles. However, when you engage in dialogue with something higher, you surprise yourself. That is how new constellations emerge.

When I came to Germany, I found meditation in drawing. To this day, it is like a space I enter to find myself.



Photographic study for *Heilung* (Healing), 2003

Family To me, family is like a bunch of grapes, closely intertwined. I believe that we do not meet our family for the first time in this life. We meet again to resolve issues that were left unresolved in previous lives. This can be challenging, but everyone has their own destiny. Parents cannot always protect their children. There are things beyond our control.



Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's great-grandmother, Amalia Araya (centre)



Photograph from a family album showing a Catholic procession in Chile

Father The figure of my father lives on very strongly in me. He influenced me greatly with his being and way of working. He studied fashion design and tailoring, and was incredibly good at his profession. He had a knack for geometry and precision. What I learned from my father is structure. Not just in terms of craftsmanship, but also in respect to the mindset required to turn an idea into something concrete. He could take an abstract drawing and transfer it onto fabric to create something perfect. I can apply this principle to my own artistic work.

Hair Hair holds special significance in many cultures. In South America, for example, braids symbolize solidarity, particularly within matriarchal structures. I think of the stories about Indigenous women or enslaved people hiding seeds in their braids so that they could sow them secretly later on. A silent act of resistance, full of hope for the future. In Indigenous cultures, cutting hair is a ritual act; for example, as a sign of mourning following a death in the family. Among the Yoruba people, part of the initiation ceremony involves shaving a circular patch of hair from the top of the head, as this is believed to be where contact with the gods occurs. This area is then painted with a rainbow. Hair tells stories. It is this awareness that inspired my video *The Secret of Your Hair* (2000). This stop-motion film comprises 300 drawings and visualizes illusions and existential questions, like an initiatory dream.

Healing I believe that we spend our whole lives searching for healing. We heal not only our history, but also what is to come. Healing happens not only in the present; it also affects the past. We are reborn into a family to take on a task. All of this is mysterious and part of the healing process. The spiritual world of the Yoruba people has been particularly important to me on this journey. It connects me to my ancestors. I have also learned to heal myself—through rituals, exercises, and medicinal plants that strengthen my aura. I also believe that music has healing powers. There are so many types of music, each with its own power. A lullaby, for example, or a mantra, or simply a sound that touches you. Music has helped me through many difficult moments.



Ritoque on Chile's central coast, 1990s; photos: Sandra Vásquez de la Horra



Exhibition views: *Anatomy Studies*, Galeria Entropia, Wrocław, Poland, 1999

Hybrid creatures In many cultures, we encounter animals with special functions, such as guardian animals. We have an instinctive relationship with these animals, characterized by a special sensitivity. In contrast, hybrid creatures are part of a mythology that deals with our connection to the fantastical. They are alive—not fictional characters, but rather expressions of another reality. They remind me that there is a deeper order which often only reveals itself intuitively. This knowledge used to be more widespread. For example, stories can often be found in our names. Exploring our roots can help us to better understand the meaning of our lives.

Indigenous My great-grandmother was Aymara and she came from an Indigenous community in northern Chile. Although I never met her, I always felt the need to understand my roots. For five consecutive years, I travelled to the desert in search of a connection to my origins. However, it was in Peru, particularly at the Nazca lines (geoglyphs), that I found real closeness. That is where I really felt I belonged. In Chile, the Indigenous population is smaller, and the country is much more European in character. In Peru and Bolivia, however, I met people of purely Indigenous heritage. I feel like we are family. This sense of belonging is also evident in my artistic work. I often paint things before they take place. It just happens. Perhaps that is also part of this Indigenous knowledge. It cannot always be explained, but it is very much alive in me.

Knowledge systems Knowledge systems help us to understand the world. They reveal the common structures of life. I often see connections between different things: for example, the blood system; and plants have characteristics that remind me of people.

Landscape To me, landscape is infinite. It is a place where I do not have to think but can feel. It carries history, memory, and spiritual energy. Furthermore, landscape shapes the society that inhabits it, including its language and consciousness.

In Chile, there are two mountain ranges that communicate with each other: the Andes and the coastal range, Cordillera de la Costa. For me, a place of connection exists between them. There, I feel the traces of Indigenous cultures and the presence of myths from a time when crossing the mountains was extremely difficult.

Landscape is not only nature for me, but also a reflection of the inner world. These motifs often flow into my art, either as profiles or as mountain ranges in the female body. I find home and inspiration in them.



Portrait of Sandra Vásquez de la Horra at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, 2002; photo: Andreas Walther

Language Language is codification. When you arrive in a country without knowing the language, it is as if you were a child trying to understand how simple things work. When I came to Germany with this feeling, I discovered unlimited stimulation in drawing. When you draw, there are no barriers.

Even if you master a language, it changes. It remains organic and alive. Each generation finds its own identity in its language.



Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's apartment in Düsseldorf, 2001; photo: Jorge Jara

Light Light—lots of light, greet the sun. Everything is in a state of flux, and sunlight is essential to life. I only draw in sunlight because something special happens then: a convergence of light, colour, and perception.

My artistic practice is strongly influenced by light, which changes with the seasons. I am particularly fascinated by the moment of sunset, its intensity and colours. At night, I retreat and occupy myself with other things.

Artificial light—black light, red light, UV light—also affects my perception and creativity. Dim light or screen light tires my eyes. We often do not realize how much this light affects our bodies and our mood.

Could we live without light? I do not think it is possible.



Photographic study for the performance *La Venus* (Venus), 2003

Love Through love, life is transformed. When you work out of love, even the most difficult tasks become easy. As an artist, I can combine everything: psychology, spirituality, the body, and drawing. I see myself as an inventor.

I also found this connection in the theories of Carl Gustav Jung and Rudolf Steiner. My professor introduced me to the method of mirror drawing. In this exercise, both hands draw mirror images simultaneously—a practice that brings thinking, feeling, and the body into harmony. This, too, is a form of love—for the gesture and for presence.

In Brazil, I encountered another form of love. There I met Pomba Gira, a deity whom many feared. People said she was dangerous, but I was completely fascinated by her—I was in love. She reminds me of Elegguá, the playful child deity of the Yoruba people.

Migration To me, migration means learning to swim in new waters. You have to observe the new world and remain calm and true to yourself. This experience is reflected in my family history. My grandfather and great-grandfather followed similar paths; part of my heritage is Spanish, part Bolivian, and part Chilean. When migration is embedded in a system, you behave differently. The children of migrants are shaped by the question of belonging.

Migration, for me, also means planting a new Earth—in my case, an Earth full of possibilities. Migration was not my decision, but fate cannot be avoided; it is not a decision of the mind.



Sandra Vásquez de la Horra with her daughter, Clara, in Düsseldorf, 2000

Mythology My fascination with Greek mythology began when I was at school. I read voraciously—stories about the Minotaur, Neptune, the Inferno, and more all fascinated me. That world full of gods, demigods, and superhuman figures was so alive for me.

I also encountered mythology at the Italian school I attended. Books such as *Incontri* (an upper secondary school reading book) were like a gateway to this world for me—full of images and texts that inspired me. It was mythology that led me to painting. It was my way of visualizing these stories, of expressing them in my own way.

Despite there being hardly any museums or opportunities to study art in my town at the time, this early fascination shaped me. Later, I studied design in Viña del Mar, but it was myths that first inspired me artistically. My connection to mythology and its archetypes remains a central part of my artistic thinking to this day.



Installation *Tunnel* as part of a class presentation, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 2001

Numerology Numerology is a very complex yet central system within the teachings of Santería. It is closely linked to the Orishas and their symbolic numbers. During a ritual, your personal number is determined using specific calculations. These calculations take into account the meanings associated with the numbers and their combinations.

The numerological oracles of Santería are highly accurate and diverse. One example is Diloggún. Several cowrie shells are thrown. Your number is determined by the number of shells that show their teeth (and thus ‘speak’).

I am fascinated by how numerology combines spiritual knowledge with a structural system. Your number reveals your story, your purpose, and your path.



Installation *Tunnel* as part of a class presentation, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 2001

Organs To me, organs are like small planets, each with its own aura and energy. In a dream, I saw them outside the body, floating, glowing, each with its own radiance; like the cosmos itself, they came together to form a new organism.

I see the organs as a reflection of the universe. My lungs remind me of roots, while my eyes remind me of planets. Our bodies bear stellar constellations in the form of birthmarks, which are signs of our destiny. We are not separate from the universe; we are a part of it.

The rhythms of my body, such as my menstrual cycle, are also connected to the movements of the planets and the Moon. The organs tell of this connection between the internal and external cosmos.



Ich fliege heute, morgen oder übermorgen (I'm Flying Today, Tomorrow, or the Day After Tomorrow), 2016, depiction of Augusto Pinochet

Religion Faith plays a significant role in my life. I have a deep respect for the world and draw inspiration from many spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Santería. The altars and ex-votos of these traditions have had a huge impact on me.

I have practised different religions, and it has been a journey of discovery. When you immerse yourself in a religion, you see the world through a new filter. When I returned from my initiation in Cuba, it was as if I had new eyes. I interpreted everything differently than I had before.

Santería Santería is an Afro-Cuban religion that emerged from the fusion of Yoruba traditions from West Africa and Catholicism. This was necessary because Yoruba practitioners had to hide their beliefs under the guise of the Western religion. At the heart of this syncretic belief system are the Orishas, deities representing different aspects of nature and human life. As a cover, many Catholic saints were equated with the Orishas. For example, Saint Barbara represents Changó. The spiritual practice of Santería is shaped by rituals, offerings, and oracles.

I encountered Santería through the shaman ‘Mamita’ (Lidia Rivalta Moré), who introduced me to the belief system. In 2003, I travelled to Cuba for my initiation—an intense, cleansing ritual that releases old burdens and provides protection through the Orishas. This ceremony is also called *el muerto parió al santo*, which roughly means ‘you die to be reborn’. This and many subsequent rituals focus on cleansing the aura.

During the initiation, the four warrior Orishas—Eleguá, Ogún, Ochosi, and Osún—are assigned to provide protection. Later, your oracle expands to include other deities to accompany and strengthen certain areas of your life. These deities manifested themselves in my dreams, and my spiritual world became broader and more complex.

Santería has opened up new ways of understanding for me. To me, Santería is a deeply personal journey that has greatly enriched my artistic work.

Seeds Seeds feature repeatedly in my work.

Even at school, I loved experimenting with bean seeds and watching the plants grow. I have done this countless times—and still do. I am fascinated every time a little root sprouts from the bean. It is so simple, yet incredible. Today, so much seems abstract, but this simple experiment illustrates that life, too, is wonderfully simple.



The shaman Lidia Rivalta Moré in Düsseldorf, 2002

Shamanism Through Lidia Rivalta Moré, whom I call ‘Mamita’, I experienced shamanism as a lived spiritual practice. I first met the Santería shaman at an exhibition in Düsseldorf in 2001. We have been closely connected ever since, and we talked on the phone every day. She introduced me to the world of Santería and has always accompanied me.

Her view of the world was completely different to mine. While I saw certain situations as crises, she often saw them as signs of protection or solutions. This perspective set me free and changed my view of life, loss, and development. Mamita was my anchor and teacher for fourteen years. Although the external ritual dissolved with her death, its essence remains within me.

To me, shamanism means having a deep connection to the world. Rituals, cleansing, dreams, ceremonies—nothing is complete; everything is in motion. Even today, I still draw creative strength from this, although I no longer perform ritual acts in the traditional sense since Mamita’s death. However, she left me a large book, a kind of spiritual recipe book, which I occasionally consult.

Symbiosis Symbiosis is like tuning into the same frequency. It is about forming relationships that enable you to feel like you are a part of someone else, to empathize with them. Symbiosis means understanding that you are not alone. It is a complex system that transcends the material world and the visible realm. Symbiosis is a deep interplay of energies.

Violence I have encountered violence many times in my life, experiencing it first-hand at demonstrations, but also in everyday life where I have put myself in danger. In a dictatorship, you live with constant risk, especially if you are young and want to party or have the ‘wrong’ friends. This is very different from living in a democracy. However, I also experience hostility in Germany. Sometimes people are friendly, sometimes not. I am visibly different—a ‘foreigner’. Violence is often the result of a big misunderstanding. It stems from failing to understand something simple, such as giving another person space or really listening to them. Violence, I feel, is a consequence of intolerance and judgement, but it is also often a means of protection. It has always been a part of humanity, and it remains a mystery as to how we would live without it.



The artist’s parents Roberto Vázquez Sologuren and Bonifacia de la Horra Vivar and grandmother Silvia Sologuren (behind)



Sandra Vázquez de la Horra waxing a work in her studio in Berlin, 2025

Water Water often features in my dreams, taking different forms and appearing in different places. To me, water symbolizes change and constant transformation. I am particularly fascinated by rivers: they change with the seasons, overflowing their banks or receding. I feel a deep connection to this movement—like a journey in which I discover myself anew, time and time again. Cordillera, my grandfather’s home, is characterized by its untamed nature and a large waterfall. When we were children, we repeatedly tried and failed to build a stone pool in its rushing waters. This illustrates both the power of nature and our constant attempts and failures to tame it. Water also plays an important role in the world of the Orishas. Various Orishas are associated with water: Yemayá embodies the sea, and Ochún represents rivers. Olokun is the goddess of the depths of the ocean, while Inle represents the coast—to name just a few examples. Other Orishas are associated with the elements of metal, fire, or air. These elements are not only symbolic but also form part of a spiritual alchemy. Without air, there can be no fire. Everything is connected.

Wax Wax envelops, like a cocoon. It is a living substance that binds the paper in a special alchemical process, ultimately offering protection and transformation simultaneously. This is the great mystery that I sense in my work when I use wax. Many people distinguish between living and non-living materials—but stones, for example, are also alive. The Yoruba deities live in them. I find this image very powerful, and it shows how life and matter are interconnected.