

Delcy Morelos: Interwoven

Across her three-decade career, Delcy Morelos (b. 1967) has highlighted connections between people and the environment. Made from natural materials like fibers and soil, her work demonstrates respect for the Earth and its elements. This exhibition features a career-spanning selection of the artist's paintings, drawings, and sculptures alongside a new large-scale installation made with local soil. With this immersive structure, Morelos creates space to reflect on our profound relationship to the Earth and the centrality of soil to the human lifecycle.

Morelos's work is rooted in her experiences in her home country of Colombia. Among the most biodiverse nations, it encompasses the Amazon Rainforest, deserts, coastlines, and the Andes Mountains. Morelos grew up in the country's north near the Caribbean Sea. As a child, she lived with her grandmother, a descendant of the Emberá people, from whom she inherited a deep reverence for nature. Morelos expanded this outlook through research into Indigenous Andean and Amazonian teachings. Around 100 Indigenous groups, including the Emberá, continue to thrive in Colombia despite centuries of ongoing subjugation and dispossession, especially of land.

Morelos's practice formed during the widespread violence of the Colombian conflict (1964–2016). This internal war was fought between the Colombian government, far-right paramilitaries, far-left guerilla

groups, and crime syndicates, with involvement from the US government and multinational corporations. Throughout the conflict, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed and over eight million people were displaced. The fighting and land theft disproportionately affected Indigenous landowners.

Morelos started her career by examining violence as something that originates from and is enacted upon the human body. In her early work, crimson pigments and rope-like forms suggest blood and the human body, which for Morelos is bound to the land through sustenance, trauma, and healing. She believes earth is a sacred source from which all life emerges and to which it returns—an idea she has explored in her work over the past decade.


These beliefs have led Morelos to see the world as a weaving in which everything that exists is interconnected. She carries this metaphor across her work. To Morelos, weaving is a process, a visual motif, and a conceptual throughline—an idea that forms the basis for *Delcy Morelos: Interwoven*.

Delcy Morelos: Interwoven is organized by Tamara H. Schenkenberg, Curator at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, with Molly Moog, Curatorial Assistant.

All artworks are courtesy of Delcy Morelos or the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

***Delcy Morelos: Interwoven* is on view from Mar 8 to Aug 4, 2024.**



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Entrance Gallery

1. **Concentrated Fields (Espacios concentrados)**, 2002
Acrylic on canvas

2. **Obstacle (Obstáculo)**, 2008
Acrylic on canvas

These two canvases (#1) are created from thousands of tiny dots painted in dark and light red, resembling valleys and ridges. They recall the topography of the Andes Mountains, which span much of western Colombia and separate the country into a striking variety of ecosystems. Beyond its ties to landscape imagery, Morelos also relates *Concentrated Fields* to waves of violence in her homeland, with the marks representing individual experiences of war that merge into collective turmoil.

In the adjacent painting, *Obstacle* (#2), Morelos again uses repetition. She deposited lines carefully with a razor blade dipped in paint. Although she used a sharp tool, the blade did not pierce the canvas but instead deposited a weaving pattern—an important symbol in Morelos's work representing that opposing elements can be brought together.

3. **Untitled**, 2012
Soil and acrylic on jute

Untitled is among the first artworks Morelos made with soil, which has become her signature material. The surprisingly intense color of the painting comes entirely from soil blended into clear acrylic paint. Morelos applied the translucent mixture to a canvas made from jute—a plant fiber—spun into coarse threads.

Red has been a primary color in Morelos's work for decades. She has described it as a bond between the body and the landscape, saying, "The color red in earth is the color of iron. Iron is also what gives color to blood." For Morelos, this is one of many deeply established connections between humans and soil.

4. **Double Negation (La doble negación)**, 2006
Acrylic on cotton thread
5. **Double Negation (La doble negación)**, 2010
Acrylic on cotton thread
6. **Double Negation (La doble negación)**, 2008
Acrylic on cotton thread

The works in Morelos's *Double Negation* series (#s 4–6) consist of individual cotton threads that the artist wove into fabric. She then painted these unconventional canvases in successive layers of acrylic, allowing them to dry

between applications. Through the act of folding and draping, Morelos gave these works their final form.

Hybrids of painting, weaving, and sculpture, these works appear soft and shiny but are surprisingly firm. Instead of fraying or collapsing, their interlaced threads hold their shape after being stretched, bent, and compressed. By fortifying the soft, woven strings with paint, Morelos imbued them with resistance and strength. Metaphorically, this can be read as an act of resilience.

- 7-10. **Eve (Eva)**, 2012
Soil and acrylic on jute and nails

To make this series of works, Morelos built up jute fabric strips, brushing each with an acrylic paint. Hung over nails to dry, the strips stiffened into organic and geometric forms. The resulting layers alternate between the natural color of jute and shades of deep red imparted by the paint. Morelos originally trained as a painter. Here she applied the tools and techniques of that medium to sculpture in three dimensions.

The title of this series references Eve, the first woman and mother in Jewish and Christian narratives. In the Bible, God forms the first man, Adam, from earthen clay. In spite of this story, Morelos associates the maternal figure of Eve, rather than Adam, with Earth's vital power and creative potential.

“When you can look your fears in the eye, the healing process begins. Therefore, exposing the problem is part of healing—they are two ends of the same thread. My Amazonian philosophy teacher, Isaías Román, of the Indigenous Uitoto, says: ‘Everything in the universe is knitted like a wicker basket: opposites intertwine in ever-closer knots until they can hold water.’ Polar opposites intertwine into a fabric where there is no separation, and we are all, along with everything that exists, threads of that fabric that receives, contains, and weaves itself constantly.”

—Delcy Morelos

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Main Gallery

In *Earthly Weaving*, Morelos invites you to move through a soil-encrusted structure that has been scented with cinnamon and cloves. Engaging your senses of sight and smell, the artist encourages you to reconsider your connection with the earth. Morelos has said: “Humans, in general, see earth as an element to be exploited in every possible way, but we miss its amazing generosity and abundance . . . because we have stopped relating to the earth as a living entity that nourishes, sustains, and renews us, in multiple senses.”

Earthly Weaving is the latest in a number of monumental installations Morelos has made with soil since 2012. In this structure, layers of eight-foot-high metal fencing covered with a soil mixture form walls that span the Pulitzer’s gallery, marking a series of passageways and rooms for you to navigate. The varied texture and thickness of the soil in *Earthly Weaving* allows glimpses into and through the earthen structure. The fencing—a new element in Morelos’s work—frames and obstructs these views and is animated by the shifting natural light that is a feature of the Pulitzer’s architecture. A building element typically used

to create borders and restrict access to land, the fencing here is covered in earth. Through this gesture, Morelos draws attention to contested land as a source of conflict, in Colombia and beyond. With their grid-like mesh, the fences also represent an extension of Morelos’s interest in weaving.

Ground local bricks and iron oxide, a natural pigment, color the soil mixture on the fences a deep crimson red. This tone recalls Missouri’s iron-rich, red clay, a central factor in the state’s historic brickmaking industry. With these material choices, Morelos wishes to acknowledge this local expression of the land.

The aromatic spices and hay in *Earthly Weaving* were grown as food, which Morelos symbolically returns to the earth as a sign of honor and respect. This action follows the Andean Indigenous practice of making spiritual offerings of food by burying it in the ground. Morelos has said of her work with soil, “I wanted to put the earth in a site of peacefulness, of tranquility, where it cannot be harmed, in the space of the museum where one could say the earth is made sacred.”

Thanks to the Griot Museum of Black History for the donation of the brick.

11. *Earthly Weaving*, 2023–24

Soil, cinnamon, cloves, hay, bricks, iron oxide, and acrylic binder on steel fencing



“A large portion of humanity has constructed a relationship of submission, exploitation, oppression, brutality, and contempt with nature. . . . By seeing our planet solely as a wellspring of resources, we give into the depleting dynamic that destroys Mother Earth. We have lost all sensibility and empathy toward our environment. We no longer know what earth is, what its essence is, nor its power or its magic. This incognizance leads us to destroy and degrade it, unaware that we are simultaneously destroying and degrading ourselves.”

—Delcy Morelos

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Cube Gallery

12-26. *Untitled drawings*, 1997–2020
Ink, watercolor, and mixed media on paper

27. *Untitled*, 1998, 2003
Watercolor on paper

Delicate interlocking shapes in red and black ink recall natural systems of organization, from nests, corals, and roots to veins and cell structures. These drawings (#s 12–27) also relate to an expanded sense of weaving as a means of forming connections. Morelos has said:

“When there is a network, there is union, and there is no room for selfishness because there is no single center. The network acts not only as a metaphor for that which is human, but for the universe itself, since in infinity any point is the center.”

This sentiment also speaks to Morelos’s recognition that we are inextricably tied to all other life forms.

28–30. *In the Personal Plot* (*En la trama personal*), 2004
Acrylic on paper

For her *In the Personal Plot* series, Morelos painted grids that resemble strands of woven fabric or the slats of a fence. The pattern takes on the coloring of the internal body, from the pink of tissue to the crimson of clotted blood. When making these works, Morelos considered the distinctions between the inside and outside of the body. She has pointed out that “the difference in color between human beings is external. On the inside we are all the same color.”

The Spanish word *trama* (plot) in the title can mean either a storyline or the vertical warp and the horizontal weft that make up a textile. For Morelos, the interlaced threads of the weave symbolize the potential to overcome divisions.

31–32. *Organized Salt Water* (*Agua salada organizada*), 2014
Soil and acrylic on jute

33. *Organized Salt Water* (*Agua salada organizada*), 2014
Soil and acrylic on jute

In #s 31–32, Morelos partially coated cotton strings in shiny, dark red acrylic paint, suspending them as if to evoke waterfalls. The same slick material completely covers a folded textile nearby from edge to edge (#33). The glistening paint simulates liquid flowing from a central crease, obscuring and dematerializing the surface beneath.

Central to human life and death, water makes up between half and three quarters of the body and is shed through tears, sweat, blood, urine, and reproductive fluids. It is also necessary for plant growth and maintaining ecological balance. In *Organized Salt Water*, Morelos highlights water as a substance that connects humans to nature and all living things.

“Red is like life—as soon as the red liquid comes out of your body, life is coming out of you. It is a very striking color because when one sees it, it demonstrates what is inside a person. When I use it, what I want to represent is a body inhabited by life—but also a fragile body, which from one moment to the next can be without that life that used to animate it. I want these images to become the viewer’s own at the moment the viewer reflects on them. I want people to experience that they have something of these images inside.”

—Delcy Morelos