



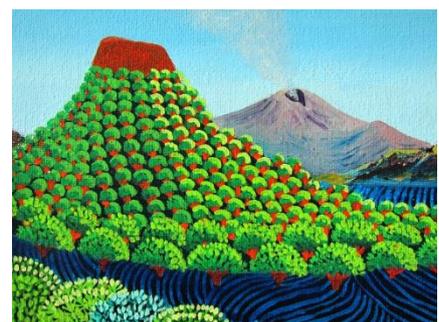
El Ojochal del Listón

by Alejandro Cabrera (b. 1962)
Acrylic on canvas (80 cm x 60 cm)

Alejandro Cabrera is a well-known primitivist painter from León, Nicaragua. Influenced by the art movement which began in the islands of Solentiname in Lake Nicaragua under the guidance of the poet, priest and revolutionary Ernesto Cardenal, Alejandro's work includes some of León's most famous murals. He began to paint in 1980 after participating in the National Literacy Campaign, joining a group of primitivist painters in Sutiava. He is often seen painting in the doorway of his house on the Calle Real.

One in a series of works depicting the life of this rural community on the slopes of Volcán Telica, *El Ojochal del Listón* was commissioned in 2011 to depict the various projects implemented by the community since 2005 with the help of the UK charity, Nuevas Esperanzas. These projects have sought to promote sustainable livelihoods in the Telica-Rota Protected Area, an environmentally-sensitive area in the Marbios volcanic range, where dry tropical forests have been under threat from illegal logging, slash and burn farming and shifting cultivation.

The two volcanoes shown in the painting are Santa Clara (left), a dormant cone, and Volcán Telica (right) which erupted in 2011, prompting an evacuation of two of the four communities located on its slopes. The view of the volcanoes shown in the painting is seen from the town of San Jacinto. The community of El Ojochal del Listón is actually located in the range of hills shown in the painting to the right of the crater. The painting is thus a composite of two different views of the community, one from a distance (background) and one from within the community (foreground).



One of the earliest projects to be implemented in the community was the construction of a 5 km road from the town of San Jacinto. This very rustic track was built through the initiative of the community themselves who worked in rotation for 6 months to improve access to their community. For the people who live in this community, this road represents a lifeline. Farmers can now transport their produce to market with ox and cart, greatly increasing their potential income, and in case of a medical emergency or volcanic eruption the time to reach the bottom of the hill is now half what it used to be.

With the nearest source more than 5 km away for some, most families in El Ojochal del Listón faced a daily four hour journey on foot or horseback to collect water to meet only their most basic needs. Rainwater harvesting has provided a viable solution. Sufficient water is collected from roofs and stored during the wet to last for the five months of the dry season. In 2006, with the help of Nuevas Esperanzas, the community built a 71,000 litre ferrocement tank to capture water from the roof of the village school. By 2011, a total of 19 tanks had been built in the community.



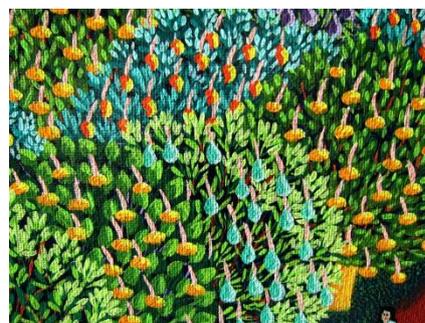
The two classroom school for pre-school and mixed age primary children was completed in 2010. Before the school was built, classes were often cancelled as the previous makeshift structure provided little shelter against the elements. All the families in El Ojochal del Listón helped with the construction, including those without school aged children. The additional roof area provided by the school building is used to harvest rainwater for the school and the community and latrines were built to provide basic sanitation for the first time in the community.

The increased availability of water in the community brought new opportunities for agriculture and, in particular, for women to have a greater role in providing for their families. In 2009, the first of several organic family gardens projects was started, helping women to learn sustainable ways of growing vegetables using buckets and hoses to provide drip irrigation. Most women in the community now grow their own vegetables, improving the diet of their children, increasing the household income and leading to a greater sense of empowerment.



A project to train farmers in beekeeping was established in 2010. Because honey production depends on pollen from flowering plants and especially trees, there is a direct incentive for beekeepers to preserve existing forests. Beekeeping is a sustainable form of income generation, and an alternative to agricultural activities which have resulted in the destruction of endangered ecosystems. Four apiaries have been established including two in El Ojochal del Listón, and it is hoped that the honey will be available in the UK from 2013 under the brand name 'NicaNectar'.

The slopes of Volcán Telica were once covered by dense dry tropical forest, but the clearing of land for agriculture, combined with illegal logging, pests, forest fires and hurricanes, has reduced the forest to small, isolated fragments. In January 2010 Nuevas Esperanzas began a reforestation and conservation project to address the loss of dry tropical forest in this area. To increase incentives for farmers to give up agricultural land for reforestation, fruit trees such as mangoes and avocados were mixed with other species native to the dry tropical forests of the region.



To find out more about any of the projects, please visit www.nuevasesperanzas.org