

The monarch butterfly in the paintings of Carmen Parra





The monarch butterfly

The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus* L.) originated 220 million years ago, when Africa and South America were still united in a single tropical continent.

The area which continental drift transformed into South America included many tropical species of plants and animals, among them the monarch butterfly.

The monarch butterfly is the only migratory species of butterfly in the world with the survival strategy of forming colonies for passing the winter in the same place every year. In a spectacular 3,000-mile flight, the species travels yearly from Canada to Mexico.

The life cycle of the butterfly begins when an adult female deposits hundreds of eggs on the leaves of the milkweed plant. Over the course of twenty days their size increases a thousand-fold, becoming white larvae with yellow and black stripes. The larva shed its skin five times during this growth period, finally forming the chrysalis and, through metamorphosis, turning into a butterfly, the insect's adult stage.

The miracle of the butterfly's migration consists of the entire monarch population from southern Canada and the northern United States, to the east of the Rocky Mountains, concentrating itself in a

few acres of evergreen and pine forests located on the border of the states of Mexico and Michoacán.

These islands of green are surrounded by areas vulnerable to agriculture and erosion, which together with massive tree felling, threaten the survival of the forests where the monarch butterfly winters and where the water tables are located that supply the local human population.

Since 1977, the Mexican government has been carrying out work aimed at preserving, for the next 1,000 years, the forests that provide a winter home to over 100 million monarchs.



The butterfly can take care of itself, but its survival requires forests with dense foliage and healthy shrubs.

Because the monarch sanctuaries are found on *ejido* [collective farm] territories, working relations have been established with the *ejido* farmers to promote economic activities to generate jobs and alternative income sources, in order to prevent the felling of pines and other evergreens, assuring the protection of both the forest and the butterflies' migratory pattern.

Thus the monarch, which is a very ancient species, has been able to overcome the greatest crises of nature,

and remains with us today. But given the magnitude of humans' impact on the forest, the monarch needs our help to survive.

With great passion, Carmen Parra—with her artistic work and boundless love of nature—has contributed, in the deepest sense, to the rescue of one of the most marvelous phenomena of life on this planet.

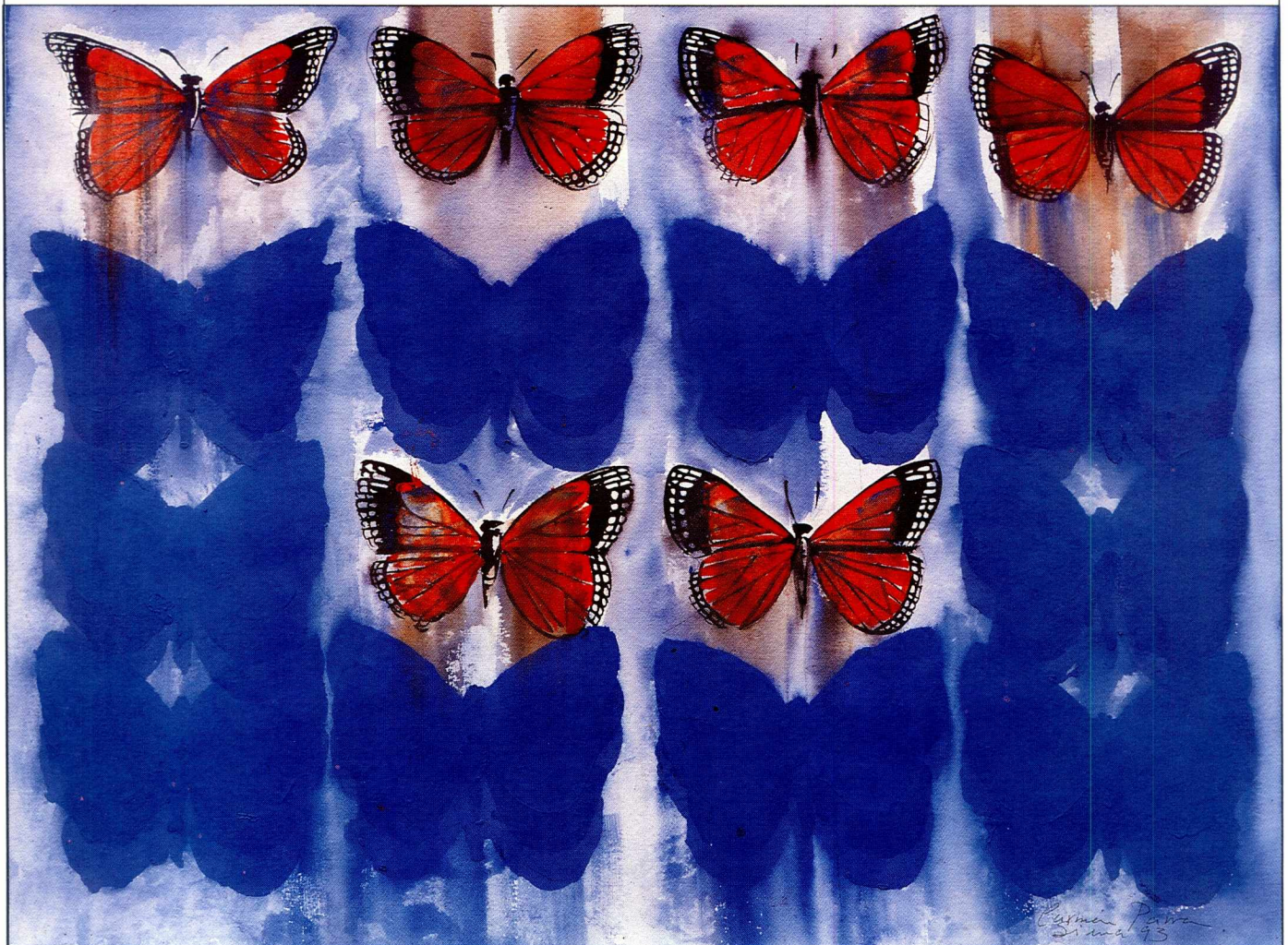
Fernando Ortiz Monasterio
Monarca A.C.

The obsidian butterfly

Butterflies have always had great importance in the pre-Hispanic

world of Mexico...and in today's world. We see them with multicolored wings in the murals of Teotihuacán, carved in stone or painted in ancient codices. Many different myths refer to them. Their importance was so great that they were even deified. Such is the case of Izpapálotl, the obsidian butterfly, the female eagle that died during childbirth and became a goddess. She inspired soldiers in combat, who frequently wore an image of the butterfly on their chests, representing Izpapálotl.

It was perhaps because of this ancient cult, in which the butterfly's



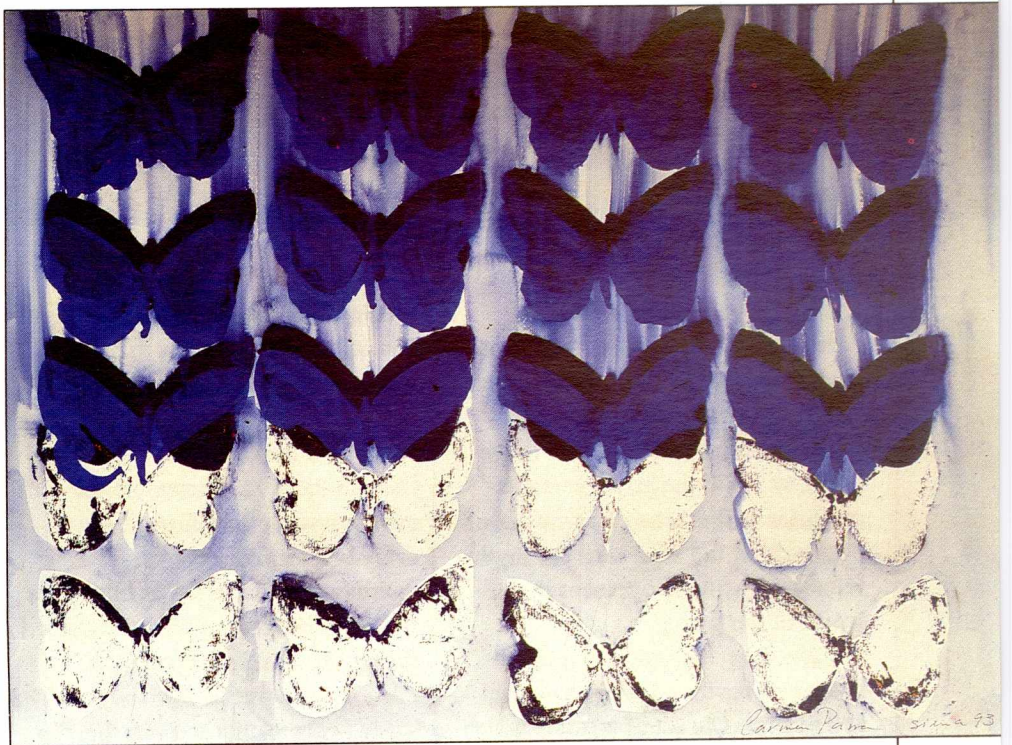




image was painted on walls, or fashioned out of clay and stone, that the butterfly decided to stay forever. And so, year after year, it returns from the underworld, located in the north, to fulfill the promise made centuries before when it came out of the world of the dead—as the myth relates—so as to be present in the world of the living.

Yet it became necessary once again to seize the butterfly's image, and paint it. The act of creation which

accompanies its comings and goings should be captured anew in painting. To do this, it was important that creatively powerful hands give them eternal life through color itself...and Carmen Parra gave herself to the extraordinary effort through which every brushstroke gave life, multiplying infinitely. The butterflies flew and the creative hands continued giving life, which stopped time....

...And so passed many a year. The hands kept creating and one fine day

the long-awaited metamorphosis occurred. Through her creative power, Carmen had unknowingly acquired the same characteristics as the butterfly...and then she learned how to fly and was captured on canvas forever....

...Since then, the colors, the butterfly and Carmen herself have come together in a single being transcending time.... ✕

Eduardo Matos Moctezuma