

# THE STONE BROKEN



First installation:  
Summer, 2004

With the participation  
of the Colombian  
artists Luis Luna Matiz  
and Rosario De  
Guzman

Materials: stones  
mirror, and rods found  
in the installation site.

## A SITE INSTALLATION BY CHRISTINA CHOW ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK "EL INFIERNITO", VILLA DE LEYVA

### *The site*

The site is El Infiernito (Little Hell) Archaeological Park, located in Villa de Leyva, on a Colombian plateau, about 2000 meters above sea level, and 150 kilometers from capital city of Bogota.

Thought to be an ocean bed in the Age of Plesiosaurus, way before the better known Jurasik era, Villa de Leyva is home to fossils and crystals, of some 115 millions of years ago.

El Infiernito (Little Hell) Archaeological Park is an

astronomic observatory installed by piles of huge human-size stones carved by pre-Columbian indigenous tribes in the shape of phallus, and placed in perfect alignment with the stars so that the tribes could make precise calculations of seasonal calendars and cultivation cycles.

The heavy stones were thought to have been transported from far away areas by supernatural means, as they were not local stones. The name "Little Hell" was coined by the Catholic priests that came with the Spanish

Conquistadores, who had been dismayed by the spectacle of such an open display of the male sexual organ.

I have chosen the site because of its antiquity, and because of its symbolic relevance to the story I would like to convey with my work.

## *The Idea and the installation*



Local peasants would break stones they find on the hills of Villa de Leyva with a pointed utensil, in search of fossils to be sold to foreign tourists, looking for cheap souvenirs in this arid, picturesque and yet much forsaken place, in a country often misunderstood by the rest of the world as mirroring a destructive social, political and moral image.

They would break the stones, and sometimes they would find a fossil of an ancient shell, and sometimes they find nothing. In either case, they always leave the broken pieces behind, as if these stones were some kind of a modern day wear and tear coca-cola bottle.

The fossils are free and they can be found everywhere. They become valuable because they are wanted by foreign tourists, so bare-chest young boys would spend long hours under the sun breaking stones to find the fossils, and then they would take the fossils to the fringe of the dirt road leading to the Fossil Museum and sell them at a cheaper price than the museum. As the business thrives, vast hills are strewn with these broken stones.

For days, Rosario De Guzman, a local artist of religious icons and imagery, took me to different hills to collect these broken pieces. I chose them for their diverse colors, tones and shapes, and we brought them to the nearby El Infiernito.





I placed the broken pieces, which came in pointed, irregular shapes and sizes and aligned them in an intuitive symmetry with four gigantic phallus. These phallus were carefully chosen according to their pictorial location in relation to the broken pieces.

### *The Concept*

The very performance of putting the stones in such an order is a ritual in front of the ancient sculptures, as in homage to honor the site, in the hope of forgiveness from nature.

The phallus have a meaning, they are symbols of fertility, of birth, of life, of creation, but the broken stones can only claim meaning when they contain the fossils that are no longer in their bosom, or now, when they are aligned to the astronomic sculptures.

The life-size phallus reflect the order of the universe, and the broken pieces reflect the order of the futile human nostalgia for the same universe.

The Colombian artist Luis Luna Matiz brought the huge mirror, and we incorporated the mirror to the landscape of the stone broken. The mirror reflects all the stones-the sculptures as well as the broken ones- and it reflects the image of the stones

broken in a meaningless effort that are now confronted to a park of sculptures full of meanings.

I like to see the reflection of that contrast: the presence of nature, caught between the stones that are broken, and the frozen image in the mirror.

I am interested in the imagery that suggests the presence of the fossils that are now absent, and the broken pieces that in millions of years from now would be destined to also become fossils, the meaning of the action of breaking something, the violence of the action in defiance of the force of nature and time, the eventual human folly in a forgotten site with the brutal beauty unscathed by or precisely because of time.

This is a work in progress and it would take 3 summers.

The second stage of the installation is scheduled to take place in summer 2008.

