

Marta's Studio with Marta Troya **an Interview by Panama Diaz**

Panama: *Hi my dear friend, just please to break the ice, start by talking to me about the project "Taita Studio".*

Marta: Taita Studio started as an artist residency in Malaga (my home town in Southern Spain). I was running it while I was living in London, studying my BA and then my MA. I travelled back and forth between Malaga and London during these years and I welcomed artists from different parts of the world to my home town. They were coming to take time off and liked the opportunity to make work from a different place. After I finished my MA, I moved back home and I realised that Taita could be much more than an artist residency. I was looking for an art studio myself, and at one point I realised that I wanted to open up a studio/gallery that would function as the base for the residency and my studio.

Once the space opened, new initiatives began to take place. As a textile artist, I love to learn about traditions that are getting lost in the fibre arts. I looked for artisans in my local area that I could keep learning from and soon I realised that, due to the old age of the artisans I met, and the fact that they lived in rural settings, their wisdom wasn't being passed on to the young creatives in my city. After giving it some thought, I decided that Taita Studio could be the bridge between these artisans and city people. Now I organise immersive weekend workshops where people can learn about natural dyeing, loom weaving and wool spinning directly from a traditional artisan and spend the weekend in nature. Really, my project grew organically from an artist residency, to my own studio/gallery, to then a platform to unite textile enthusiasts. I feel that, because I'm so young, Taita Studio is be a project that will develop and change as I evolve and grow as a person. But I can already see that its focus will be around art, handmade processes and connecting people in conscious ways.

P: *I love how it blends so many of your interests together. Can you tell me where the name comes from?*

M: At first, I went through so many names, so many! All the names were related to the word "father".

My dad passed away when I was eight, and with the money he left me I was able to study Fine Arts abroad. Without it, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to live this way and work in this field. Even though at the time it was a truly sad moment in our lives, I've always felt very thankful to him, and I wanted to say thank you through my project. He allows me to follow my dreams and that's why all the potential names for the project were about my father. I was born in northern Spain and, in this region, instead of saying "daddy", like "papá", kids call their dads "aita" or "taita". I quickly felt that "Taita" was the right name for it. It's catchy and I knew that name could work well for the logo. Now everyone is "Oh, are you in Taita?" or "How is Taita?". It will always be a way of saying thank you to my dad for letting me live a creative life.

P: *How did your creative dream began, have you always had a creative practice or has it been something gradual?*

M: My mum says that I was always drawing and painting as a kid. I was an only child and I wasn't brought up in the best environment. Every time there was drama around at home, I'd zoom out and make art. I guess I grew comfortable in being in my own imaginary world. For example, when I'd

go to my parent's friend's house, I'd always take my colouring pencils with me. I didn't want to cause any trouble, so I would just paint for hours. I think art was my way of healing and processing events since a very young age. I'm not so good with words and it's my way of understanding the waves of emotion inside of me. When I was teenager I disconnected a lot from this side of myself, like most of us, right? (laughs).

Eventually, I chose Art as one of my A Level subjects. That was when I realised how much I benefited mentally and spiritually from spending time inside an art studio. I even quit one of my other subjects to have more time for art. No one in my family had done anything creative and no one in my school was considering to be an artist. It's not common to choose this career path in southern Spain, especially back then. It was when I moved to London that I felt I'd found my place in the world, basically.

P: Art as a healing tool. Do you think that you still use art today as a way to zoom out from the world and discover what's going on inside you?

M: Definitely. I think that if I didn't have art I would be in a very strange place (laughs), so it's definitely my way to heal, my way to exist and where I find a lot of meaning to my life.

P: You work with mixed media, what is so special about fabrics and materials? Do you know where the love for these techniques comes from, or how was transitioning from painting as a child to working with fabrics as an adult?

M: I also question this myself. I don't fully understand why I feel so connected to textiles and handmade processes in general, but I know that when I use a paintbrush I don't become so emotionally involved in the process. If I'm not directly touching what I'm creating, it's like I'm not fully present. I also like to spend a lot of hours making art, because I really love spending time alone and doing something creative, so I feel that handmade processes take a long time and I connect to them because of that too. Whenever I've tried to do something that is not very tactile I really struggle to connect.

P: I have totally seen that in your journey. Tell me a bit more about your journey with materials. I know you have travelled a lot, but what places have you been to that have shaped this practice, and how have these places transformed your artistic pathway?

M: When I arrived to London I wasn't sure about what I wanted to create, what I wanted to say or what kind of artist I wanted to be. I studied abroad in China for six months and this place and time really acted like a mirror for me. I arrived to an environment and a culture that was completely foreign. In a way, London felt somewhat familiar as a European city, but China felt like starting life from zero. There, I realised how attracted I was to the textile world around me, as I was magnetised to fabrics on the streets, on the markets and everywhere in general. I made a lot of work with found materials and natural fibres that I was collecting and also buying.

I slowly developed an interest in traditional textile processes and I applied for a scholarship to go to India to live with a community of weavers. I was granted the scholarship and I left for two months.

I feel like travelling for me is so much about self-discovery. When we go to a new place we find pieces of ourselves that we didn't even know existed. When we're outside of comfort zone, and at the same time making art in a new environment, we open new doors to ourselves and therefore to our practice. At one point, I got obsessed with travelling to places that would completely shift my perception of life. I applied for Andrea Zittel's residency in the Arizona desert, where I spent fifteen

days living in an open cabin, just basically tearing apart how I went about living my life. From there, I started to believe that the way we live will directly influence our art practice. If we live surrounded by an artificial environment, we might end up making art from a superficial place in ourselves and feel disconnect and lost. However, when we're surrounded by a natural environment we meet a raw and naked version of ourselves, more connected to the earth, to our bodies and to who we are at our core. I feel more aligned to myself now that I don't live in London and this has been reflected in my work.

P: So, How do you think that all that travelling around the world, and being out of your comfort zone, and the work that you were doing then, contrasts with the work that you are doing now, that you are working from home (in your home town)?

M: Since a few years back, I haven't felt the need to travel that much. I focus on finding new ways of travelling within me, through daily yoga practice, meditation, herbs or through dreams. Even though sometimes I'll judge it as boring, this way of travelling feels more realistic and deeper. This is why I was fine with moving back to my home town, which I never thought I'd do. I think it had to do with learning to appreciate the little things in life and realising that living a simpler life can help go deeper into the work. Making art from home makes sense because I can be inside my own bubble, without almost any external influence or outside noise. It's just my universe and I can create from there. I don't really read to find references, and I don't look at other artists' work that much. It's about looking within to realise that the work is already there and has always been there.

P: There is a lot of vulnerability in your words, and I truly believe that the world needs more of that, but how do you feel when people talk about your work, considering how personal it is?

M: Because my work is so personal, I know that there are many people that don't connect with it, but there are always many others that do. Some people don't understand where it's coming from, or they don't relate to the place where it's coming from within me. But I feel we all share the same human emotions, so someone might visit my studio and say "wow, I really connect with what you're trying to say, even if it's not expressed with words". Other people connect with it because they also work with textiles or ceramics, and so on. Honestly, I don't really care (laughs). Some people won't like it and I understand that. There are many others that see the works and fall in love with them, so it's OK.

P: I see, it's open to all. Although what you do is about a personal journey do you think that, apart from that, your work is themed?

M: Yes. I mean, when I'm making it I think "shit, this piece is so different from the previous one", but then when I see them together as a whole I feel it all clicks. One month I'll be making a textile tapestry and sewing, then the next month I'm doing ceramics, and the next one I'm weaving the ceramics inside a loom... I might move onto inks the next month (laughs), and then after maybe 6 months I bring everything together and I look back and I'm like "yes! it feels like it's all made by the same person". The themes are usually maybe spiritual, or about self-discovery, also about human psychology, emotions. I like to include crystals sometimes, or make reference to the chakras system, colour therapy... It's always very autobiographical, and because of that many of my emotions get involved, so the theme I mostly return to is emotion.

P: I guess it is very interesting to see how people react to some of the very personal pieces you do. Do you feel the need to explain some of the pieces sometimes, or do you think that you shouldn't have to? Should art be explained?

M: If someone asks I will explain the piece and put it into context for them, for sure, but I don't think we need to be there to explain the work. My pieces are quite self-explanatory, you can feel it. I know people sometimes need language to understand something and I'm happy to be there to explain it to them, but I feel that if you're a sensitive person, and you have this ability to go deeper into things, you'll connect quite quickly to the essence of what I'm trying to say. You'll understand the feeling.

P: *And now that more than ever, because you are welcoming people not only into your studio but into your house, do you have an intention of what you want people to feel when they come into this new space?*

M: (Hesitates) It's not really intentional. Wherever I go I think I end up creating the same kind of atmosphere around me. For example, if I change flat or if I move to a new place, I'd make that house have a similar feeling. I didn't put a specific intention when setting up this space for instance. Beforehand, I didn't plan "I want people to feel calm when they come in", or "I want people to feel a specific emotion inside this space"...

P: *But its a super calm environment. The energy is so good here, really...*

M: (Laughs) Thank you, I've been told many times that people feel grounded when they're around me or around the spaces I create, like a very earthy feeling. But I don't know, because I'm not that earthy myself (laughs). It seems like I'm always projecting this feeling of being grounded, when truly I'm a roller-coaster inside (laughs). There's a lot of wood in the house, which I think helps to create that feeling too. There's wood above our heads, under our feet... it's like a countryside house, although I live in the city centre.

P: *Now that you've said earthy, how does astrology relate to your world and your practice?*

M: That's also maybe a theme I return to, astrology. I've always been interested in astrology, since I was a kid. My parents would have friends around the house and I'd always ask "what is your star sign!?". I knew the star sign of everyone in my class.

P: *You do know everyone's chart. The star sign of our friends and the friends of friends, family members, partners, ex-partners (laughs). Looking at the stars, what does the future hold for you?*

M: It's just always been in me. I simply embrace it more openly now. I think it's part of my path, as well. For example, I've almost no earth in my chart, I've no air either, so I'm mostly fire and water. I feel that we're a reflection of what's happening up in the skies, and we're one with it. Through astrology we connect to a larger vision of life and it expands our consciousness.

I recently started teaching workshops about weaving basics and the moon signs. I think it's very nice to combine different fields. I don't know, when you go to art school they teach you that the norm is to focus on just one thing: be a painter, or a photographer, or only an artist. Since I came out of formal education, I feel like it's OK to finally integrate and blend throughout my day my love for art, for astrology, nature, surfing... why not?! There's so many things that you can be passionate about and it's OK to sometimes bring that into your practice, or have them separate... do what you want! Humans are dynamic beings and school sometimes makes us feel like we're off track if we dive deep into other interests. I'm definitely very happy to be free from that now.