

BIENAL DE  
CUENCA

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El viaje eterno

Teo Monsalve

Curator: Santiago  
Rueda Fajardo

## **Teo Monsalve: The Eternal Voyage and the Cartography of Cosmic Mestizaje**

The Eternal Voyage unfolds in three acts as an aesthetic, spiritual, and political journey across the Pacific Ocean—an ocean rarely considered a cultural and geographic bridge, yet absolutely central to the material and symbolic mestizaje of the Americas. The project does not stem from archaeological nostalgia; it is rooted in the present, from where it reconstructs imaginary and personal routes, weaving together the history of exchanges between the Ecuadorian coast (Manabí, Santa Elena) and the Mesoamerican region, particularly the territory of present-day Mexico.

The backbone of this installation is Neotropical Futurism, an ongoing project in which Monsalve proposes an aesthetic that takes a speculative turn: How can we imagine the future from a profound, ecological, and sensitive relationship with the tropical landscape? How can we activate a science fiction of the earth—a cosmology uncolonized by progress?

The first room presents a copper engraving mounted on a structure resembling a totem or ritual column. It depicts El Chawarquero, a mythological figure inspired by the Aztec goddess of the agave, Mayáhuel, reinterpreted within the Andean-Ecuadorian context. This figure embodies the ritual and transformative power of the agave—a plant that, according to Monsalve, has traveled between Mesoamerica and the Andes, leaving biological and cultural traces that still ferment within the fabric of the territory. The Serpens constellation, once used by Pacific navigators, appears intertwined with this icon, establishing a crossing between ancestral navigation, sacred botany, and scientific visibility. The use of copper is not incidental: it has a long history in pre-Hispanic metallurgy and today is essential to global telecommunications and technologies. The work brings indigenous temporality into tension with contemporary acceleration, revealing how ancient materials and symbols continue to emit meaning in the digital age.

The second room presents a large-scale mural painted on paper made from agave-derived fiber. The fiber is not a mere support but a symbolic body. Monsalve turns it into a metaphor for the mestizo body—an identity that does not dissolve into a homogeneous synthesis but rather juxtaposes and strains against itself. The marbling technique—immersing paper into floating pigments over water—creates undulating, unpredictable surfaces, reminiscent of ocean waves or the inner maps of the unconscious. Monsalve reminds us that the flows between Ecuador and Mexico were not only of cacao, spondylus, and copper, but also of images, symbols, affections, and knowledges that still vibrate beneath the crust of the present.

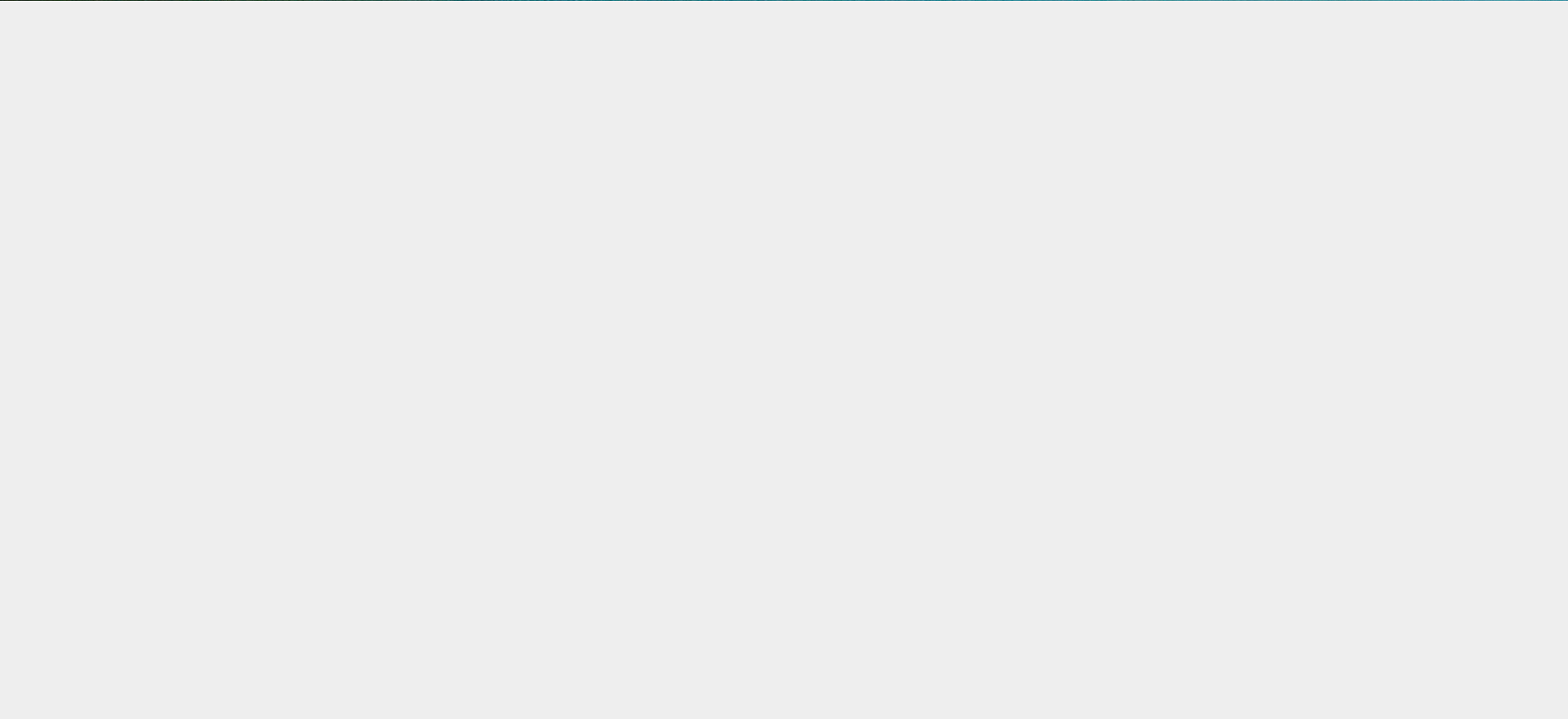
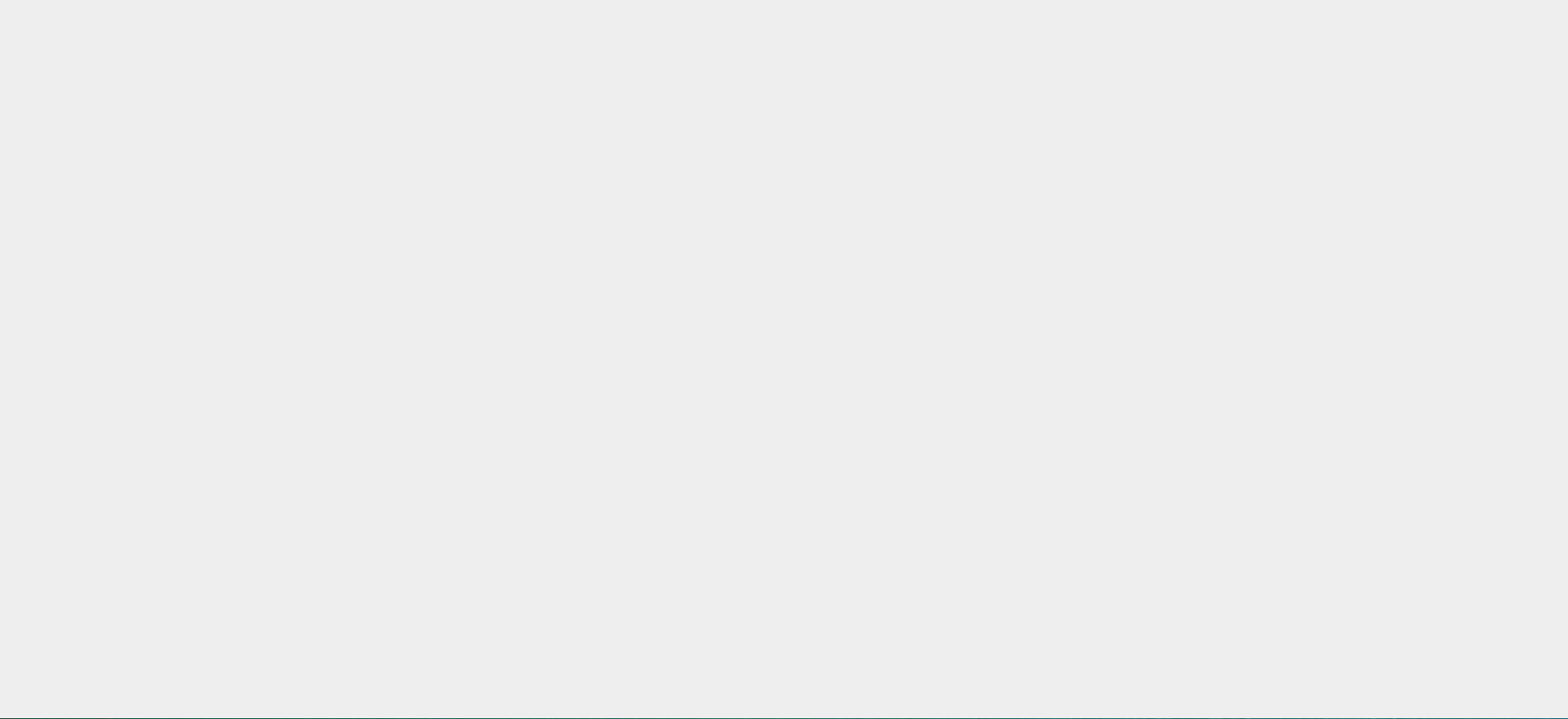
Finally, the third room features a wooden conch shell gilded with gold leaf, created in collaboration with master artisans from the Hermanos Fuentes workshop in San Antonio de Ibarra. The piece enacts a temporal and formal collision: the sculptural technique of the Quito School—an icon of Baroque colonial art—is here used to carve a pagan, cosmic symbol. The conch refers to the number zero in Mayan numeration, and to the notion of fullness, closure, and the beginning of a new cycle.

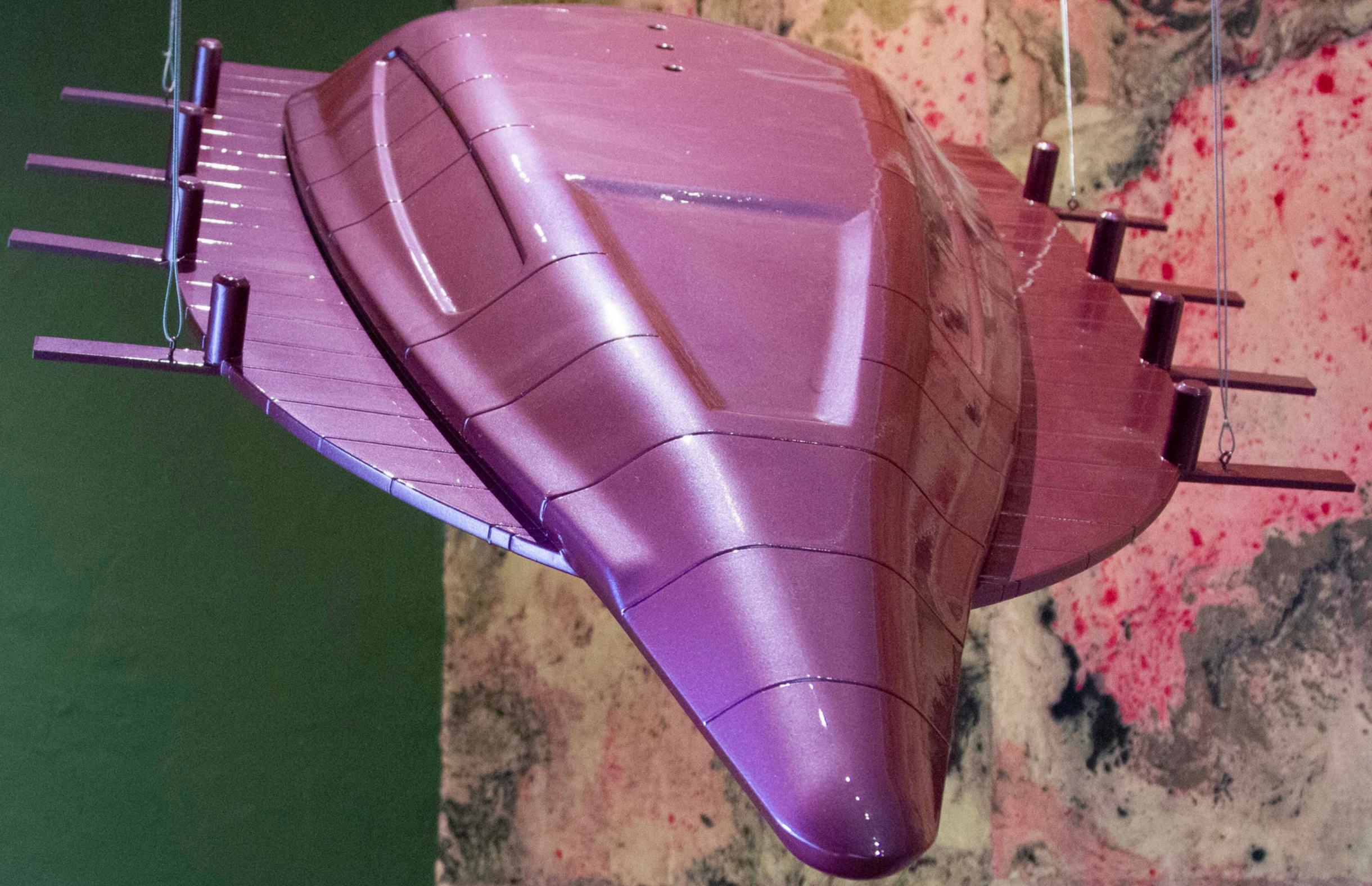
The choice of the conch is deliberate: it holds the sound of the sea, acting as an antenna that receives and emits signals from that expanded Pacific—where history is not a straight line but a loop, an echo, a vortex of memory and transformation.

Santiago Rueda Fajardo







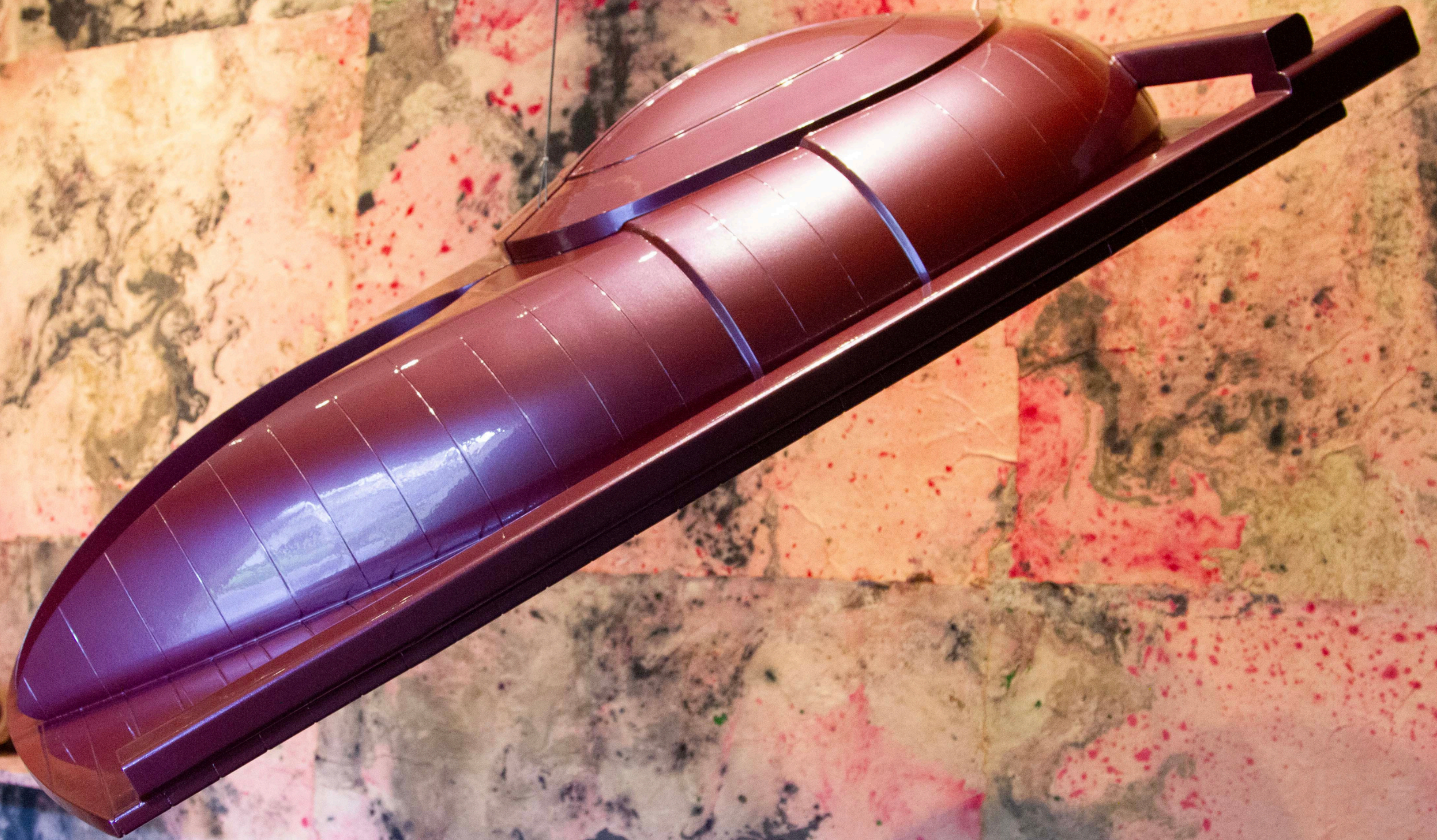














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