



my city

# MEXICO, THE COUNTRY OF A THOUSAND LIVES...

By Aziza Alaoui

Surrealism must have been born in Mexico. It is so full of paradoxes that it has given me the opportunity to live many different lives all at once. Trying to understand the country's different faces has not always been an easy task, but one thing is for sure: in Mexico, every day, you have the chance to smile. It is a country of paradoxes; with its incredible rainforests and majestic nature and the amount of trash in certain cities; international business efficiency and a splendid detachment from punctuality and commitment; churches and religious ceremonies everywhere and a culture of secret lovers and mistresses; first class highways and holes in the middle of the roads of residential districts; an ancestral civilisation full of wisdom and an attraction towards Americanised shopping malls and a consumer society of 'Made in China'; the richest man in the world and streets filled with homeless children; a culture of revolution and the longest dictatorship of a political party; Nobel Prize researchers and a high level of analphabetism... the list is endless. Even the Mexican relationship with its historical past is surreal. The people are extremely proud of their glorious history, Maya, Aztec, Totonac, Zapotec and so on, yet consider it 'chic' to be of European descent with a Spanish accent, blond hair and blue eyes. So many contrasts... This is what has allowed me to touch and feel multiple facets of human reality at several levels.

Mexico has also given me a very interesting perspective on the history of art, different from my Arab-European education. From the steles and wall paintings of temples of old Indian civilisations, beautiful statues and impressive architecture to colonial art, the mixture of Spanish and indigene

expression that can be seen in the numerous museums or 'live' in the colourful streets and of course, the kitsch present in every house and every market. On the other hand, galleries, biennales and art museums display works from Contemporary artists from all around the world and remind us that Mexico is a country of the 21st century. In Mexico, art is an integral part of life. If you don't paint, you play an instrument, you create handicrafts, you dance, you sing or you write.

Art is omnipresent. Mexico automatically awakens any secret talent you may have and allows you to practice it either professionally or just for fun, by offering a wide variety of art workshops, even in the smallest of villages. The city where I live, Puebla, also takes me back to my origins, Morocco, with its patios, fountains and the blue-and-white handmade *Talavera*, so similar to the ceramics of Fes. No wonder, as the first Spanish conquerors had already been influenced by eight centuries of Arab presence in Andalusia. To my surprise, even some typical gastronomical specialties are the result of Indo-Arab fusion like Mole, a sauce made of seven chillies, chocolate, almonds and sesame, invented by Spanish nuns. It is difficult for me to write about my impressions of Mexico in short, for the country is too complex and the experiences too intense. I will simply conclude by saying that because the Mexican is a warm and joyful person by nature, because the country is rich in culture and has an Arab heritage, breathtaking landscapes and strong colours, integration has never been an issue for me. I just let my five senses enjoy the complexity of my new home. In the silence of my studio, I try to reinvent my own reality every day, embracing what may happen.