

Mist of the Earth - Denise Milan

CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER | AUGUST 5, 2012 | BY: JEFF STEVENSON | [+ Subscribe](#)



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Arts & Exhibits newsletter

Denise Milan: Mist of the Earth

Guest Writer: Melissa Gumbs

Running now through January 6, 2013 at the [Chicago Cultural Center](#)

Hailing from Brazil, artist Denise Milan is known for her work in photo-collage and sculpture as well as her ecological activism. Her newest show, *Mist of the Earth*, is a celebration of all those qualities. Housed in the Chicago Cultural Center's Chicago Rooms, the exhibit takes visitors through three concept themes, 'Paradise', 'Paradise Lost', and 'Paradise Regained', all with a heavy emphasis on images from the Atlantic forest within her homeland of Brazil.

The show begins in the large room deemed 'Paradise'. Over-sized photo-collages fill the room with brightly colored flora standing out strongest amongst the imagery. The beauty of nature is the focus here and while faces of people, birds, and animals are also depicted, flowers and vegetation take center stage. The images depict a lush, thriving landscape, very different from the one that surrounds the city of Chicago. A large rock-like structure is placed in the center of the room, a basin carved into it which is filled generously with water. This adds to the feeling of being within a sanctuary; life could exist here.

Entering into the second room, visitors are informed they have entered into 'Paradise Lost'. There is a definite change in the imagery. The bright, friendly colors of the previous room have disappeared and have been replaced with tones of grays and golds. The sun-drenched vegetation is no longer present and photographs of cows and death hang in their place. Desolation appears to have taken over the environment and the feeling of hopelessness rings out through the works of art.

The final room has been determined to represent 'Paradise Regained'. While many of the images are black and white, the back wall contains a large, blue landscape work. Its placement, at the very end of the show, after all the images of devastation, acts as a beacon of hope. There is still a possibility for change.

Milan has a unique artistic eye. Her photo-collages, compiled from her own photographs taken over several years, have a mixed perspective to them. Objects of varying sizes- photos of different plant and animal life that do not typically go together, are jointly pieced as one to create new symbols representative of Milan's home country. The artist is sharing her unique vision of Brazil with the rest of the world.

Mist of the Earth is one of the larger art exhibitions on display at the Chicago Cultural Center, a necessary requirement in order for the artist to successfully display her ecological awareness message. While many of the images are breathtakingly beautiful, visions unfamiliar in our own urban landscape, the show also acts as a sad reminder of what can happen if environmental care is not given. It is that two-prong approach of message and aesthetic beauty that signifies Denise Milan's success as both an ecological activist and artist.

Denise Milan: Mist of the Earth, presented by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, opens Friday, June 8 with a public reception in the Chicago Rooms at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. The exhibition will remain open through January 6, 2013 in the Chicago Rooms gallery, located on the northeast side of the building on the second floor.