

## protagonist

### "Observing Flowers Soothes the Soul"

*THE WATERCOLORIST CRISTINA COROLEU CREATED A PROJECT TO PROTECT THE NATIVE FLORA THROUGH PAINTING.*

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On a September afternoon, when the silk floss trees were starting to bloom, Cristina Coroleu went to Parque Chas to pick their pink flowers. But when she arrived, she noticed the tree she always visited had been cut down. She kept a dry branch, which today has its own place in her studio, and started her project Samohú (which means "silk floss tree" in indigenous language.) The project consists of recovering the ephemeral beauty of the country's flowers through art. "The aim is to protect and disseminate Argentina's native flora through paintings for people to recognize and look after it," says Cristina.

Her project actually started developing many years ago. As a young girl, she loved eating begonias and her father, a nature-loving agronomist, used to take her and her siblings to plant poplars in the fields of Río Cuarto. She studied History in Córdoba and, later on, Graphic Arts in Amsterdam, where she lived alone with her eldest son for seven years and got steeped in Pop Art and Dadaism. In her free time, she used to visit the Van Gogh Museum with her son in the stroller. There she discovered the painter's personal collection of Japanese stamps, which she never forgot.

In 1984, she returned to Argentina, and soon afterwards she immersed in oriental art. But little by little, she started observing the flowers of Buenos Aires. "They awakened in me love, sadness and the feeling they were defenseless," tells Cristina. She used to go to Palermo with her youngest daughter to practice Tai Chi under the Jacarandas. And through the flowers, she started discovering the colors of the city: the way it becomes pink when the Tabebuias bloom, or red, violet, yellow and orange. She spent long hours in the Botanical Garden learning about how Carlos Thays had devised Buenos Aires almost 100 years before. That is how her first exhibition of watercolors on the flowering of Buenos Aires was born. Gradually, Project Samohú started to come to life. For the last three years, she has been dictating intensive seminars in Buenos Aires, Salta and Entre Ríos. For five days, she meets the local painters to paint and study the flowers of each region. Sometimes they put some flowers in a basket to paint them, and other times, if it's not the flowering season, they copy them from photographs. Her next destination is the south of Argentina and the Cuyo area. Her dream is to connect the entire country. "I know it is an ambitious project, but the global climate change, both in concrete manifestations and in serious reports, speaks about the irremediable loss of different species of flora and fauna. Thousands will disappear as a consequence of deforestation, negligence and the abandonment human beings have exposed their habitat to. That is why art is a means to protect them," she explains. It is a very meticulous job, since her work becomes known by word of mouth, from artist to artist.

Following an ancient Japanese tradition, which consists of sitting under the cherry trees with white tablecloths for the first flowers to tinge it, Cristina has been organizing Hanamis in Buenos Aires for a year to contemplate the ephemeral beauty of the native tree's flowers in bloom. "It is a way of being with the tree and its flowers, of observing them and becoming aware of the happiness of witnessing their bloom, because we are moving increasingly further away from nature. These are moments to soothe the soul and to reconnect with the ephemeral beauty of the flowers because, otherwise, we will be lost," she says.

The next Hanami will be held on March, during the flowering of the silk floss tree, the Samohú.

[Pie de foto] Cristina is a watercolorist. She is married, she is 58 years old and has two children. She studied history in Córdoba and Graphic Arts in Amsterdam, where she lived for seven years. She has a master's degree in sumi-e oriental art. She has held numerous exhibitions of oriental art and, since 2000, of native flowers all over the country. She's the founder and alma mater of Project Samohú. Its aim is to preserve the country's native flora through painting.

[Recuadro] A hundred years ago, Carlos Thays planted trees that change the color of the city according to the time of the year. In September, it is pink with Tabebuias. Red with the cockspur coral tree, the Jacaranda tinges November with lilac, the Tipas give yellow to December and from January to June, the silk floss trees dress the city in pink.

For more information, visit [www.cristinacoroleu.com.ar](http://www.cristinacoroleu.com.ar).