

# That scar was a flower in my life

When I was 17, I had just left school, but I didn't know what to do with my life. From school I knew I wanted to do something that had to do with creativity, so I thought about studying graphic design or something related to politics, because I wanted to change the world, so another option to consider was studying political science. At the moment I want to change the world too, but no longer from politics, I know it is a sterile struggle in that area. But the truth was that I didn't feel part of the world, part of that whole life plan that we've been sold since childhood, that idea of mechanical life that comes down to making your life a career: be born, study, work, get married, have children, keep working and die. Yet that strangeness I always felt. I've always felt that I don't belong here, I feel that people by inertia cheat, steal, is dishonest, and if one is not equal is judged as the weird person. Even the strangeness I feel at a metaphysical level, I feel very strange for having a body, it weighs me, it doesn't liberate me, I've always considered that the greatest quality a human being has is being free, and that doesn't happen often in our society, and that leaves people in general hopeless, from a young age I thought: I don't want to be part of this circus.

So in that confusion I said to my dad: I want to study design, and he told me: No. you have to be an engineer to continue the family tradition. However I wasn't interested in engineering, so we agreed: I would study something that was in the middle of design and engineering. He got me a scholarship to study industrial design. There I lasted a long period... 2 weeks hahaha, I always arrived very drunk at 3 o'clock in the morning to tell my dad that I didn't want to study that, I was going to retire, I was bored, and I got to talk to the dean, the career director, teachers, etc., no one could convince me.

Then I told him I wanted to study art, and he told me he wouldn't pay me for it. When I refused, I began to wander for 6 months. There I

sensed that my life wasn't going to be like any other, that I didn't want to go to an office or sell things that I didn't need or nor would I buy.

I was very confused and sad, I had a growing depression about not being able to find my way and fantasized all the time about killing myself, I had the craziest visions about suicide where I got into meat grinders over and over and over and over again, stabbed me in the chest repeatedly with a kitchen knife, or took some pills with alcohol, before they took effect I threw from a building and in the air I shot me in the head before it fell to the ground.

I even made a suicide plan for the Colpatria building (the largest in Colombia at the time). I spent my days between suicidal thoughts, alcohol consumption and glue.

There I started using marijuana, cocaine, and repeatedly cutting off my arms in some kind of strange ritual in my room, that whole time was a self-destructive spiral.

In the confusion of not knowing what to do, I stayed at home in the morning. One morning I was going through my home library and I found a book I had since I was a little boy. A book by Quino, the Argentine writer and cartoonist named Mafalda, and I had put a label on it to identify it as mine in kindergarten. This one said, Name: Uriel. Occupation: Pintor. And I opened my eyes giant and said: my inner child always knew I was a painter, so I will fulfill his dream, I will be a painter... And so I decided that my life was going to be devoted to the arts.

I kept going through the books in the house. My parents' house is full of books, engineering, literature, phonaudiology, medicine, art and spirituality, etc. And I found a book of my grandfather, it was a collection of booklets called "famous sick people" and had a book about Van Gogh, I already knew his painting, but I didn't know his story and when I knew it I fell in love with his way of seeing the world and I felt very identified with him, he became my inspiration.

At the same time I went out with friends to get drunk, to parties, but I was always the one who didn't fit, I didn't like the usual parties in my country, where reggaeton, merengue or salsa are danced. In contrast I liked going to the woods and talking about life, about love, philosophy, art, spending the day in the parks and getting into trouble, fighting, I liked drum and bass parties or punk concerts and all of a sudden I was abandoning everybody, I would walk through the city alone at 3 o'clock in the morning completely drugged, between the violent streets of Bogotá. I would go through hooks in my face, I would burn with cigarettes and cut my arms with scalpels. I think I consciously sought to indirectly feel death, but at the same time I think I was unconsciously looking for something that would make me feel alive.

Then someone said to me: hey you are like "Felpo". Felpo was a punk kid, he had a screw in his ear and a red-pink crest, he liked Nirvana a lot and a punk band from Medellin called Gp, one of the best bands I've ever heard, they grew up in the middle of a completely rotten Medellin commune, it was the time of the 80s and Pablo Escobar dominated the whole drug trade, killed police and narcos every day, and put bombs everywhere killing many innocent people, a total chaos.

In between were these boys of our own age (17 and 18), with no money, no future. They would pick up some jars and some poorly made instruments and start singing everything they lived and thought about, but it's one of the bands that I consider going further and doing poetry, this is a song I heard at the time, it's called: El desafío (the challenge).

*Silence, when we are beset by pain is ideal and pain being a symptom that we are here we must be strong to face it.*

*And you can't find your way  
I see myself in your reflection  
faces on every wall of silence  
laugh at your pain  
you have no one to trust*

*nobody deserves to know your suffering  
only the ruins in your solitude  
fan the strength that keeps you going*

*Nothing in the middle of everything is fullness  
is the home of your internality  
you feel bad is the horrendous fragility  
your wings are broken  
You can only live it  
as the rock never forget  
the faithful shelter of coldness  
that will protect you from wounds  
Wisdom conceals your wounds  
teaches you to bleed in secret  
that's just one option*

When I met Fabian I felt that the world was alive, that I was not alone in the world, that man was also very strange. One of the things that surprised me was once we said to him: Felpo vomited, and Felpo vomited food even though it was already in his stomach for several hours, he could do it at will, controlling his body in a manner worthy of a Freak show.

He had been in a psychiatric center because he was bipolar and they called him Felpo because here the bags of cocaine are called "Felpas". The man did a lot of cocaine. That was his rough part. But he was also a very sensitive person, very intelligent, he wondered about the nature of the stars, about spirituality, about reincarnation, with him we talked about politics, biology, art, music, about life in general. He had a Labrador dog that he told all his problems. When I met him he had just gone through a very hard time and had converted to Christianity. At his bedside table he had a lot of little papers with messages on how to save himself from the clutches of hell and approach enlightenment.

One day we took a trip to Medellín, looking to escape from everything. We traveled to a path called Marinilla where part of his family lives. On

the way we made a pact. We said: "Whoever first commits suicide visits the other after death, to see if life after death exists".

That trip was very important. There I met his girlfriend, who was his cousin, her name is Paula. She is a witch, witch not in the sense that Western history has taught us, but witch referring to a woman or man in full wisdom of his human condition and his energy, of its connection with the earth, plants, animals and stones, the primary elements and who knows how to manipulate symbols to change consciences.

However in Marinilla they are still very old-fashioned. In the village they saw her as the crazy one, who talked about strange things.

When I arrived we made an instant connection. She told me several interesting things: She told me we all have 3 angels, that they are with us all the time and take care of us, and that hers are called Valentin. She taught me techniques to see the aura (sometimes I can see it, sometimes I don't) and taught me to travel to places where you can't travel physically, through meditation. It was very similar to the beginning of getting high with glue, I heard crickets and felt pins all over my body and then I heard an echo and I was sort of floating away.

We did that a few times and I was trying to learn. But the trip was crazy and we didn't keep practicing. We lived in a tent for about a month and a half. The tent was full of empty beer bottles and cobwebs; we used cocaine and drank a lot of alcohol.

One day back from a party a guy who was called "the Twisted" took out a machete and wanted to kill me because I had long hair. He was one of those ultra-conservative people who believed that men can't wear long hair.

Another day Fabian arrived at 6 o'clock in the morning very drugged and said to give him the keys of the car because he was going to kill himself. He wanted to jump off a cliff that was about 100 meters away. We pushed each other and ended up punching each other because I didn't give him the keys to the car until I could control him and after

crying a lot he fell asleep. Woke up a few hours later, he didn't remember anything. Everything was madness, at some point I got tired of so much destruction and I returned to Bogota.

11 months later my friends called me to tell me: Fabian had committed suicide.

That day the world was destroyed for me. I realized what would happen if I killed myself, all the pain it would cause my family, my friends, everything would be destroyed. Somehow I had a very romantic idea of suicide. That news beat me up and left me lying on the floor.

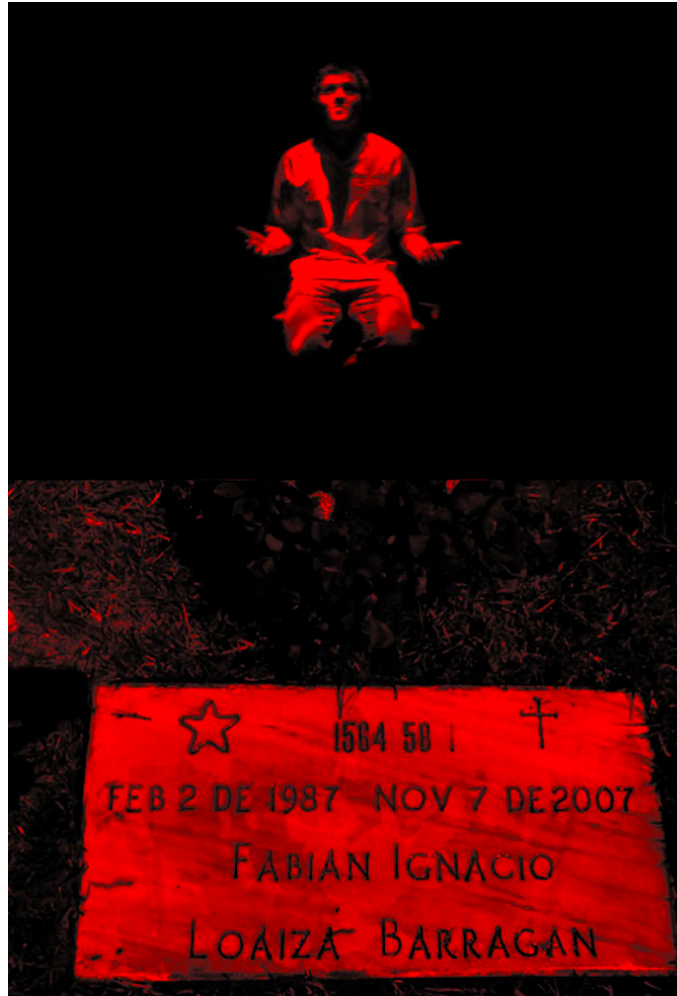
And one day Fabian kept his promise, he visited me.

I felt when he came to my room and hugged me. It was a weird feeling, like telling me "I'm here", but I felt a tremendous pain, I felt my head turned upside down, my mom told me that I looked drugged all the time, My pupils were very dilated and I couldn't sleep. I felt like I was going crazy. I don't really remember a lot of things from that moment. I think they were so strong that my mind generated a blockage.

Fabian wanted his body to be cremated, his family buried him.

And I meanwhile was taken to a psychiatric center, my mom was scared because I looked very unbalanced, and I got into an even deeper depression, everything looked dark, nothing made sense, I didn't know what I was doing or why, I was at a dead end, I knew I didn't want to kill myself, but I didn't want to live anymore. Fortunately I wasn't institutionalized, but I started taking antipsychotics and antidepressants.

However, the universe very wisely gives you what you need to learn, even if at first you don't understand it and it was about to begin to discover that meaning that I had always sought.



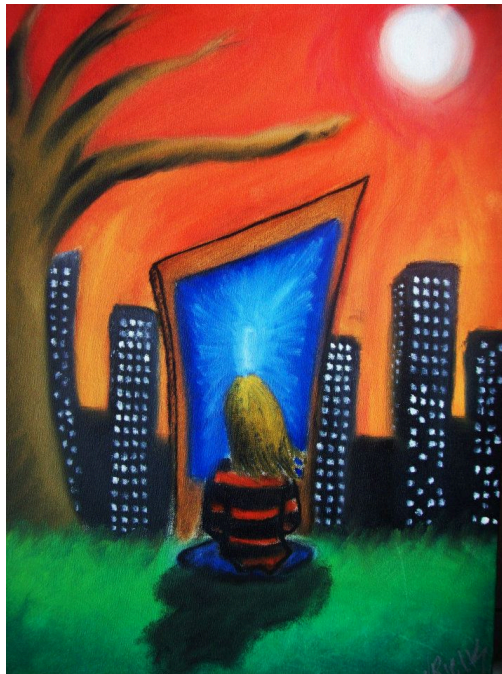
## The healing power of art

After 6 months of wandering, my mom tired of seeing me do nothing, invited me to her country art classes, it's a kind of class where they teach you how to make trays, napkins, wooden things, etc. So I went to class with her a Saturday. That day was a little uncomfortable, 7 ladies painting and me sitting in a corner. The teacher, her name is Martha but they call her Martica, she said to me: what do you want to do? I looked at her as if to tell her: "nothing, I'm okey", and my mom said: "he also paints, he likes to draw". I was ashamed. I was like: "Hey, don't say anything, I can't paint".

Then she said to me: ah you want to paint? And she took a canvas, some brushes, some oils, and she said to me: take it, paint it. And it

was as if life itself was giving me the brushes in my hand saying: do you want to be a painter? Do it!

And I started to paint. When I finished the painting, in a few hours, the teacher was so pleased with the result that she told me: you know what?, come on, I'll give you free lessons, and in this way I started to paint. This is that first painting, it's very important to me.



My father, who did not want to pay me for art, began to see the paintings I made and recognized in me a talent, sometimes I found him in silence standing in front of the paintings trying to decipher the meaning of the images. And then he said to me: -okay, what do you want, and I said to him: I want to study art, and he said to me: - no, for art I won't pay. Then I said: -ok then a photography course. So I began then to study artistic photography at the French Academy of Image in Bogotá. In that course I went so well that he told me: "Ok, I'm going to pay you for a technical career, but not a professional one" and I started studying art at the "School of Arts and letters". And there I learned from everything, drawing, painting, sculpture, pastels, computer design, video, etc. and with my



colleagues and a professor we formed a foundation called “Fundacion Cuartodehora”. But the most important thing is that I started to heal.

Around that time Fabian’s suicide happened.

In the days following the suicide I began to notice something very strange, whenever I felt close to Fabian, that I felt footsteps behind me and there was no one, who felt that they touched me, gave 11:11 in the clock: At first I didn’t pay much attention to this fact however it began to become more and more repetitive, so much so that not only was it on the clock, but if we went to a restaurant we were given table eleven, If we parked the car we were given the parking lot 11, if I watched the television the number 11 came out, if I called a taxi I had the plates 111, everywhere I saw that number.

I also had very strange dreams. And here I must also make a clarification; I think that dreams are psychic maps, where we can glimpse both the emotional state of the human being and the images that structure it. I’ve always had a very close relationship with my dreams and I write them every day.

In one of them I traveled to hell, it was a place full of mountains of skulls everywhere, the ground was skulls and the sky was red. I was there looking for something, on my back a big white wings were born. I walked and walked looking for something important but I had no idea what it was about, after a long walk I finally found her, she was in the distance floating on top of a mountain, it was a black woman who had 6 arms and on her back they rested six swords, it was meditating on a portion of land, calm, on that mountain of skulls, at that moment I knew it, it was in that horrifying place seeking wisdom.

I woke up and immediately wrote and drew the dream.

That day, a cousin by my dad named Elive, invited me to see a guitar recital at night, strangely I arrived early, I’m not the most punctual person in the world. When I arrived there was no one in the concert hall except some old people who were about 5 places near me, and since there was no one else, I heard their conversation. With surprise I

discovered that they were describing my dream! They described a journey to hell in search of wisdom, and said it was written in a book! At that moment my cousin arrived and I could not continue listening, the room was filling up and they changed the subject, I could not believe it, how it was that they were describing exactly my dream?. Then quietly, when the concert was over, I followed the gentlemen and fortunately they continued talking about the book, I heard it was called The Revolution of Lucifer, a certain JJ Benitez. I decided to start looking for that book. I looked for it all over the downtown and did not find it, they always told me that it was sold out, that it was not available and etc... So I stopped looking at it for a while in the bookstores and looked it up on the internet, so I found out that the book was based on another book called the Urantia's Book.

Then in a design class a professor named Alejandro Gordillo told us that he was not from this planet, that he was extraterrestrial. That he came from one of the pleiad stars, and that this planet, planet earth, is called Urantia.

Then I met some friends in sculpture class and they started talking about Urantia without having met Alejandro.

So it was not just the 11:11 that was repeated, but Urantia also began to appear in my life. And I said, this can no longer be a fluke. So I started looking and I found that 11:11 is the hour of madness, the hour of a new mental opening, that right now there are 1,111 beings helping to take a step for humanity, a very difficult step, which is to change your vibration level in order to raise the planetary consciousness, and that possibly someone who had recently died had been able to open that door.

Urantia is a text written by means of mediumistic communication by the elder brothers or higher spirits, in which they explain how the universe and the superuniverses are formed. What the myth of lucifer symbolizes. They talk about the life of Jesus whom I consider a punk magician, a very special being who also came to do a tremendously difficult task and came down from the highest spheres of the universe,

and his teaching is one of the simplest and therefore the most complicated: the power of love, of the energy that unites it and gives life to everything that exists in the universe.

Just as when they say, "When the disciple is ready, the teachers appear," a very important teacher appeared in my life, his name is Jorge Pachón. He began to give us a class called Bidimensionality. That class was a death, and a rebirth.

Jorge practiced a very special technique, which consisted of forcing us to un-learn many concepts that we already had from the garden, the school, the family, society, and he wanted us to detach ourselves from all this. So that we could begin to hear the truth that was within us, through the handling of images, objects, and poetic creation.

One of the exercises was very interesting: Jorge put us to fill a sheet of cardboard with different spots as if we were ants, that is, if in a small place of the surface we made stitches, we couldn't make stitches anywhere else, so we made little balls, stripes, spots, etc until the ideas ran out and we hadn't filled up even 10% of the cardboard. Then we all started pushing our limits and started doing crazy things, for example I ended up taking a blue ink and vomiting it on the cardboard, then a friend named Marcela and a dancer took off her shoes and smeared her feet with blue ink vomit and danced on her cardboard. And so, little by little, through those kinds of acts, we filled up the entire board.

Then, with the help of a viewfinder, we went all over the surface and chose certain images that seemed interesting to us. We cut them out and ended up with 7 or 8 cards with very abstract images, stains of color and textures. Then Jorge would sit at a table like a tarot card reading session and we would sit in front of him as he examined the cards.

To Marcela, the dancer, he said: mmm bulimia. Just like that, with the coldness and care of a doctor who examines a patient's body and identifies his illness. We all looked at each other strangely and looked at her, she started crying and said: Yes!. She did have bulimia and

was in treatment at the time. We were very surprised; we didn't understand where in the midst of those stains he had seen a message as clear as bulimia.

It didn't make any sense. Then another friend, his name was Mario, Jorge examined the letters, took one and said: there is a dead man here, and he is small, he is a child, and Mario also began to cry and said: Yesss!! I wanted him to be born but she did not want to, and she aborted him. And wow!! , that blow our socks off, as he could see that so precisely?. I was anxious to know what he was going to tell me. When I passed by he told me something that I still understand today, he said:

*You're like the air.*

That class was a before and an after in my history, in that moment I had long hair, I cut it completely, I shaved my head and I wanted to end that cycle of destruction that had reached that point culminating with Fabian's suicide, so as part of a Homework I did a performance to pay homage to my friend who was gone, and I promised never to hurt me again, here's my action:

<https://vimeo.com/43290899>

I put in the class room a wooden cabinet, a burnt canvas, and a succession of repeated photographs with half of Fabian's face, which were pixelated. If you approached the photographs you only saw stains of color, but if you walked away you could see half of a face that repeated itself like a loop and was changing color, from bright colors to completely dark colors, in the darkest part the face mingled with an octopus tentacle symbolizing the way Fabian died, who hanged himself.

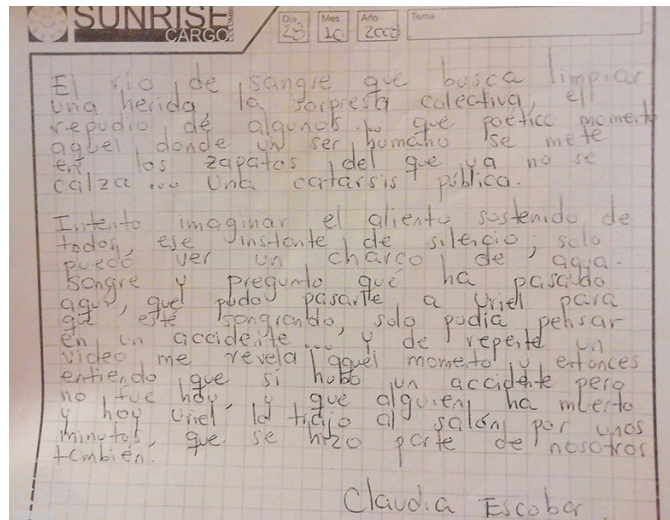
There was also a small tape recorder that played a song by Skeeter Davis called The End of the World, which I had seen in the movie Girl Interrupted, where there is a girl who hangs herself and plays that song over and over and over and over again. While the song was playing, I opened the wooden cabinet and pulled out a scalpel, cut my left shoulder, very deep, and with the brush I drew the number 11:11 on the canvas. At that time there were about 8 people looking at me, but I wasn't present in my body, it was like I was 10 feet above my head, I remember everything as if I was watching everything from the roof, it was very weird.

Each person had a very different reaction, one began to cry, another vomited, another became ill-tempered and did not want to look, the one recording focused only on the blood, each of them kept a writing of that day, this is one of the ones I like the most, wrote Marcela, the dancer:

*The river of blood that seeks to clean a wound, the collective surprise, the repudiation of some... that poetic moment in which a human being puts himself in the shoes of the one who no longer wears... a public catharsis.*

*I try to imagine the sustained encouragement of all, that instant of silence, I can only see a pool of blood-water, and ask, what happened here? What could happen to Uriel so he is bleeding? I could only think of an accident...*

*And suddenly a video reveals that moment to me, and then I understand, yes, there was an accident, but not today, someone died and today Uriel brought him to the salon for a few minutes and became part of us too*



Thanks to that action and the writings of the people who were there, I understood that my healing process began as I used my sensitivity to touch others. That it could be a bridge and that people could identify with an act and feel what I felt and I could feel what they were feeling. I felt united to people in a very special way and that moment was unique. United us in a very unique way and evolved into a very strong friendship. Although one might say: smart, healthy. But life is not so easy and it throws you a curve ball. There is a phrase by Joë Bousquet that I like very much:

*On lui a dit que la vie était belle. Non! La vie est ronde.*

When I finished doing the performance, Jorge told me: Uriel, you have to go to a hospital to be cured. That day I bought a new scalpel, and because I was so nervous and “I wasn’t” in my body I made a deep cut, and I didn’t feel pain, I almost cut the muscle, the blood kept coming out, my arm was covered with blood and on the floor lay a red puddle. I told him no, that I left her like this, without healing, but he told me it was necessary. A friend who had done another work, a vest with sanitary towels, lent me one and glued it with masking tape.

So I called my girlfriend at the time, her name was Tatiana and she was studying psychology, I asked her to come to the hospital. She got mad. She scolded me and she told me that if for that I was studying arts and so on. I had to go to a children’s clinic that was the closest.

There everyone looked at me in a strange way, me with my cut arms and the sanitary towel hahahaha.

Finally, after waiting a long time, a nurse called me and said: Well, and to you what happened?: I told her everything. 10 minutes later I had about 8 nurses around me while I was telling them about the meaning of art and what the performance was and why I had been cut off. They all told me it was very interesting, but they couldn't take care of me in that hospital because I was of age. So they put a tape on me and I went to another clinic.

There I met Tatiana who continued to scold me. 2 hours after arriving I was admitted to a room where there were 4 people, each one with a story: one had broken his foot and had it backwards, another had broken his nose, another had cut his finger at work, and I was again the rare one talking about art and performance.

It was the only wound of all those that I did that healed me. Then my mom and my sister arrived, they were very understanding, they did not say anything to me and they accompanied me. We walked then the 4, my mom, my sister, Tatiana and I through a corridor when the warder says to me: Wait a minute, you can't go out, first you have to see a psychiatrist, I laughed and they took me to the office.

There was a psychiatrist with a robe white and a notebook sitting behind a desk. He started asking me questions such as: what happened to you? , how it feels? , why you did that? , etc.

I assembled the entire exhibition in his office. The photographs of Fabian, the canvas and the cabinet, I described everything to him in great detail and told him about how art had helped me to express all my pain, had allowed me to experience a duel in a creative way and had given me the opportunity to heal an emotional and spiritual wound through a destructive act and homage.

The psychiatrist just looked at me and said: uhmm... uhjummmm... mmmm... I already see... as I wrote tirelessly in his notebook. At the end, when I finished speaking, he said to me: Well, I really

congratulate to you, I've never seen anything like that, that someone worked with their own pain to create something and heal, I don't see you sad or depressed or wanting to commit suicide, and everything you tells me makes sense. So I wish you every success and be on your way.

That day I felt like I was born into the world in another way. I had won a battle with the world, and I took several big steps towards the essence of myself. I realized that those scars I'd been given had become a flower in my life.

Then, doing a reading of the I ching with Jorge, the book told me something in relation to what he had told me: you are like air.

The I-Ching said something like:

*Don't be like fire, because even though it lights up, scares. Be air, because even though it doesn't feel is necessary to live.*

That is a lesson that has cost me a lot. I find it difficult to understand all its multiple interpretations, but I am still learning.

Uriel Ladino Rojas