

Prologue. Learning to unlearn within museum: Resonances with indigenous creation

Collections of the Bank of the Republic

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In 2023, the Bank of the Republic celebrates one hundred years of history, in which the emergence and positioning of its museum collections are intertwined with a museum vision that has been evolving over time. This exhibition, which is part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Bank's founding, aims to propose new ways of exhibiting the collections, proposing plural narratives and questioning categories that have limited the country's cultural imaginary and have marked art history with stereotypes about identity. Museums are institutions that reflect traditional power structures, and are also platforms from which the museum entity can initiate processes to reverse the univocal and categorical voice that has characterized them, and promote a multiplicity of interpretations that vindicate the power of cultural diversity. This exhibition is part of that critical modernization process.

Proposing doubt as a reflexive gesture seeks to open the debate on how we can conceive possible futures for museums today. The project involves starting with questions rather than absolute truths, making it possible to review the fragmented



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perspectives imposed by the term *art* on cultural production articulated from a country like Colombia.

The pieces that make up the exhibition "Sowing Doubt: Cues to Indigenous Representation in Colombia", the majority of which come from the collections of the Bank of the Republic, dialogue with the thinking of past and present indigenous peoples of the country, who in turn bear witness to the transformation of perspectives on cultural production and art in the museum. The exhibition follows a journey through cues, understood as axes that invite the public to question the chronological timeline of history and the sense of alienation from our own heritage, brought about by entertaining notions of visibility that stem from inherited colonial discourses. These groups of objects, images, and sounds also speak of tensions that have arisen due to the normalization of dominant places of artistic expression, and in this sense suggest decolonizing possibilities with new interpretations.

Following a reflective intention, the curatorship has been accompanied by dialogues and listening spaces with indigenous communities, in order to go beyond academic research and embrace certain meanings of ritual. These dialogues include meetings in Leticia with grandmothers who take care of the chagra of the Ethnographic Museum of the Bank of the Republic, conversations with the Intercultural Indigenous Autonomous University (UAIIN) in Popayán, as well as a talking circle with the youth of the National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (Opia). Ritual spaces for lighting



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fires in the museum, or for singing songs to archaeological pieces as part of their care in the Gold Museum alongside some creators and leaders from indigenous peoples, have also accompanied the reflection. The actions and thoughts, which have been collectively sown for the exhibition, break the association that insists on linking indigenous creation primarily with the past, characterized by archeological perspectives, in order to recognize its agency in the present.

The processes undertaken highlight the communities' call to question the museum as a static place that turns the subject into a mere exhibition object, in order to transform it into a space for cultural dialogue that addresses, through artistic creation, what it means to be indigenous today. This task is also essential as a call to stop perpetuating violence, dispossession, and victimization against indigenous peoples, something that art history is no stranger to.

The exhibition project is accompanied by a "living curatorship", which aims to create spaces of action and expression for indigenous communities in the museum's galleries, opening up places for their knowledge. Taking into account knowledge shared by several of the country's native peoples, the aim is to weave together experiences that provide opportunities for partnership and cooperation through the exhibition. This is not only through works by indigenous artists, but also those by artists or collectives that, without belonging to any ethnic group, have demonstrated good practices in the conservation or transformation of indigenous knowledge and ancestral teachings in collaboration with the communities



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themselves. Beyond art, we are interested in designing a social mutualism that promotes new ways of creating, thinking, and interacting for mutual benefit in museum spaces.

The exhibition design, carried out by Organizmo in collaboration with several artisans, was established through a sustainable proposal that creates more ethical spaces and relationships with the environment. The exhibition is based on the experiential and intuitive possibilities of perceiving art and space as a reflection of a territory. The visitation of the works will be accompanied by symbolic materialities and soundscapes featuring the voices of grandfathers and grandmothers who, when asked about their relationship with art, describe it as a way of life in harmonious communication with the environment.

The Cultural Network of the Bank of the Republic is undertaking a management approach that seeks location-based knowledge, tied to local processes, and thus openly encourages artistic expressions to be understood in all their complexity and diversity. This is one of the most important aspects of its work: being a network that connects multiple, and even opposing, ways of understanding creation. With this in mind, the process has also involved a specific acquisition program to increase the presence of creators from the country's native peoples in the art collections.

The more than 800 pieces included in "Sowing Doubt" span a time frame that begins with pre-Hispanic creation, passing through colonial times, the "scientific" representations of 19th-



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century travelers, and notions of modernity in Colombian art, up to the 21st century. In this ambitious way, a dialogue begins among the collections of the Bank of the Republic: the Art Collection, the ethnographic and archeological collections of the Gold Museum, the photographic and documentary collections of the Luis Ángel Arango Library, as well as some external loans. The richness of this selection enables ideological exchanges to displace the notions of art that have isolated indigenous creativity, with hierarchies that dismiss what is folk and artisanal, or even appropriate it from the category of primitivism.

By sowing doubt, we evoke ideas of multiple and open modernisms, where uncertainty is a virtue that enables temporal exchanges across new contexts and geographies of art. We facilitate "heterochronicity", that is, the possibility for ancestral times, their territories, and knowledge to be read alongside a highly urbanized, mestizo, and complex present, thus vindicating a Colombian cultural production rooted in simultaneity.



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