

Walking among the word

Elder Andrés Castillo of the Pijao people. Ortega, Tolima.

Art is understood as the means through which people communicate and express a creation using various resources, criteria, rules, and techniques. Through art, we convey ideas, emotions, sensations, perceptions, and so on. Contemporary indigenous artistic practices can refer to research products, topics related to events and cultural expressions present in rituals, cuisine, weaving, myths; in other words, cosmogony in general.

Contemporary artistic practices can be done individually, collectively, and collaboratively with the population involved. Likewise, at present we are carriers of thought in the past, present, and future. We are a body-territory in any space we inhabit, and, furthermore, through artistic practices, we can preserve our origin and identity.

As a strength, there's the opportunity for engaging in a collective dialogue of thoughts and knowledge with a criterion of mutual respect and acceptance. It is also a process of teaching and learning, a mutual nourishment to foster understanding and establish a healthy and peaceful coexistence.

As native indigenous peoples, we are a rich and diverse nation, inheriting customs, thoughts, languages, and objects with various uses. We have means of self-expression and communication, such as the art of dreaming, weaving, ceramics, and more. Both art and aesthetics are involved in these practices.

We acknowledge that during the Conquest, there were cultural impositions of our own behaviors, thoughts, and interests – some positive, some negative, and even some adapted to our needs. For me, it is very important to preserve our origin and identity in contemporary times, fostering a horizontal dialogue where we recognize,



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accept, and respect each other for a harmonious coexistence, while maintaining unity to achieve common objectives.

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In my thinking, in my feeling, I'll say it outright: I don't like folklore. I don't like the idea of reducing indigenous communities solely to a folkloric showcase, encompassing only a few dances, petroglyphs, or ancestral paintings, for instance. That's to say, I like to make a distinction between the spiritual and artistic production in itself, which is solely and exclusively intended for the expression feelings, to thinking of an individual as indigenous in the sense that this individual construction as an indigenous person is guided by our world view, our community, and our experiences.

So, applying it to what occurs within my community, indigenous art is storytelling; it's recounting our emotions, how we feel, and how we relate to others from our indigenous perspective. It's not about relating to the West or to productions with different viewpoints and constructions that stem from distinct emotions and thoughts. It's about a spectrum of sensations and emotions that don't subjugate the narrative we tell.

That is what I understand as art from our perspective: the manifestation of the thoughts and feelings of indigenous people. I believe that everything can be related in different ways: in a sense of domination, in a sense of interaction, or of interculturality, or of otherness.

There are various discourses that can be addressed in the context of art, but the central focus in these discussions and interactions is the differentiation between what can be considered Western and what can be considered a product; for instance, an indigenous aesthetic production. Therefore, while artistic production is often an individual endeavor, as I mentioned at the beginning, the community manifests itself;



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communities must be able to relate to and feel understood by the artistic forms created by our artists. That is why I believe that this would be a fundamental leader. In my opinion, we must look towards new experiences and open ourselves to interculturality, to go beyond the folkloric, as, with all due respect, the figures of our ancestors can be. But this involves more than just using the same symbolism; it's about expressing new ideas and symbols. As indigenous peoples, we have the capacity to create new symbolism that resonates with our identity, offering new meanings to new perspectives, to new works.

That is what I believe. The indigenous artist, and indigenous people in general, are highly adaptable without losing their roots, knowledge, and cultural foundation as indigenous individuals. They can encapsulate all of this history and thought, whether on a canvas, in a mural, a sculpture, a textile artistic creation, or in a dance, although I should refrain from speaking about dances, as they often tend to be overly folkloric, as I mentioned. We can create many artistic forms, and there are many indigenous peers who are doing so. It is a clear sign that we can adapt without losing our fundamental principles: our culture and our identity.

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Here, they are not speaking of the art created by each people. The art is distant, here art knows no-one. No people knows art, but the West brings it, looks at these peoples, and thinks it is art.

For us, it is knowledge that exists in the territory. It can be considered a form of art since working the land or sculpting stone involves life cycles, spiritual connections, and the use of symbols and symbology, akin to what the Western world calls rock art. And for us, it is a mandate. A mandate of life inscribed in stone. In the West, they might label it as art, art made by our ancestors. However, we don't refer to it as art,



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instead it is knowledge embodied in the law of origin, that is etched in the stones. I don't know how many centuries the term art has been around; it must have been around for a long time, but for our communities art is unfamiliar. It's not art but life itself; for us in the West, it falls under the category of art. One conclusion I would give is that for us, from our world view, it doesn't represent art, but the knowledge that is written on the stones, that is written on the trees, that is written on the birds, that is written on the clouds, or that is written on the constellations.

For us, it represents a way of seeing through ancestral wisdom, through our ancestors. It's a way of seeing the stars, a way of seeing if the wind comes from the right or from the left, or how nature responds. This is knowledge that the West may or may not label as art. Our worldview and knowledge are in the earth, and that is how they manifest. Our ancestors expressed themselves by writing on stones, creating petroglyphs, as they are called, though for us they are not petroglyphs. We understand the meaning of what is written on the stones.

This is knowledge that we have preserved and will continue to preserve as an art form, as an ancestral art form, and knowledge that is connected to our lives and the life of all the communities. Not looking, let's say, to the West, but instead seeing that each people has its origin.

That is what it represents, through various forms of expression of nature and human beings observing nature. It is possible to reach the conclusion of how knowledge has left its mark in various corners of the world, not only on this continent but across the globe.

This is what the accident itself represents, as it determines the rock art, which dates back a billion years. For us it's the same, like Chiribiquete or San Agustín, where you can see how the elders carved the stone to talk about symbols, nature, medicine, work, childbirth, the negative and the positive.



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**SEMPER PARATI
LAI DUA**

That is art for us.

Elder from the Kogui people. Summit of Indigenous Peoples. Silvia, Cauca.

— Among the Kogui people, the word *art* does not exist. There are other concepts, such as drawings, each with its own meaning. Thus, art is understood as a millennia-old instrument of the principles of life that is captured in stone. Art is everything we physically perceive in our surroundings, it is imprinted on the skin.

There are *nujué* drawings. These tell you where the mother of a snake is, where the drawing of a bird is. They directly tell you where that species of bird is; they are nature's indicators.

Everything is made. If there is a *poporo*, a gourd, or a star on the stone, they are indicating that this is the space where one can communicate with the star. Art already exists in nature, art is already there. Another thing is that we do not know how to identify these indicators of nature. *Du Ganavi* is the father of art, who began to create similar to man. The mask, the gold he turned into the mask, in the rings, where he explained how we were going to use them not only physically, but also that some are stored and invisible.

At present, there is art in the Sierra, such as the creation of *nujué*, which represents territorial and physical cosmogony. We also have the art of weaving clothing, bags, and the *tutosoma*, each with its own meaning. There is art in the river. Everything is interpreted by the *mamos* (spiritual leaders). The form that appears in the river is also a form of art: the art of the stars. All of this art already existed.

Furthermore, there is the art of playing the drum and the *carrizo* flute, but there's also a territorial cartography that has existed for thousands of years. There is the cartography of the breast. These arts are preserved by humans.



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Art also extends to speaking because language is the art of transmitting; it is depicted on the legs, they are forms. That is, pretty much, what I could tell you about the art. Art isn't about celebrating the day of a particular holiday. That is why the discourse of the people of the Sierra will encompass other dimensions, not what we are celebrating today.

In our ancestral calendar, there are three calendars: in March, in June, and in October. These are three special calendars. They are not for celebrating, but for sitting down to talk about the art of spinning and the art of *mambear*. That is art. Art does not involve alcohol; no art involves alcohol, because if you use alcohol to make art, you affect others. These are already the secrets of the peoples, of different peoples, as some of them use alcohol; that's perfectly fine. All this is not an art that we have lost, but it is one that is in sacred spaces.

The Kogui people have an art of figures. We know that this is where the game was, this is where we can discover the original library. This isn't the cave library that we often talk about. Yes, there are some, but there are many more dimensions to the calendar or the art of spinning. That's why we speak of *seshisha*.

This is all I can share; I am not revealing everything. If some of us solved this, it cannot become "the Kogui said that", because many times any indigenous person, often unintentionally, as El Chavo would say, asks a Kogui, and they write, "He said that". So, the elder asks, "What? What did you say there?"

So there are some contradictions, some fights, and people from the outside believe what is written. That's why it's necessary to be reserved in certain matters.

— I ask because the art that was not referred to as art was known as something else; it was magic. This magic resided not only in the creation of important sacred objects, but also in a worldview that involved returning to Earth.



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- This is called *kalwaka*. Many of the masks that were taken to other countries served the purpose of making an offering to the Sun. "All these masks are condemned, they are condemned and they are asking for help, they are asking for help," say the *mamos*.

They are asking for help, they are asking for help, but if they have been in another country for several years, perhaps it's because they have fallen in love with that land. We don't know. Someone may say that a mask should be returned, but won't take part in the process. For example, I come from the Sierra, and if I see a girl or a friend, I would remain here. It's an interpretation of what not to do. So the question is whether to leave them there or return them. We are currently in the process of returning the masks in the Sierra, all the masks of the Sierra.

Elder Lorenzo Tunubalá of the Misak people. Manuel Quintín Lame Indigenous Art Gallery. Popayán, Cauca.

I am Lorenzo Tunubalá of the Misak people. I am part of several processes as a traditional doctor and in the field of indigenous art, and I help in the processes led by my colleagues who have begun to walk in the spiritual spaces. Among these processes, there are several in the department of Cauca, in Colombia and around the world to showcase. Since spirituality is a part of our cultures and of other cultures, it is a reclamation of the past that has been attempted to be erased.

Our communities have been in charge of various processes, and these processes have led us to see that there are many differences. Through art, we demonstrate how society has evolved by walking among the word, that is, what our elders have told us. This is about constructing a historical memory, not as a violent reaction, but as a



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response to coexistence and the well-being of these peoples. Or, as our brothers used to say, living a full life, but through the connection with nature.

Edinson Quiñones is a colleague who has been part of this hard work of showing the cultural identity of the land, the cultural identity of the people. Everything we do has been part of this process, which I, as a traditional doctor, have also been involved in, to support various processes. We must pay tribute to various places, including the mountains, the plains, and in response to what Mother Nature has given us. We should give thanks for all of this.

For us, art would be a spiritual representation to harmonize with Mother Earth. Through these initiatives, I have become familiar with various local, national, and international initiatives. I have participated in these endeavors through the spoken word, harmonization, and offerings to Mother Earth. We have done everything through consultation with the spirits. If nature tells us no, that we cannot do something, then we don't; this is what we call the law of origin. Every people has their own world view, and we, as Misak people have both the right and the profound responsibility to coexist in harmony with nature, as equals, or among other human beings as well.

In this way, the path we have opened was in order to search for processes, to safeguard this land that safeguards us, this mother that receives us, and to understand that we are rarely capable of thanking Mother Earth. So, through art we must learn to recognize the earth, learn to recognize who we are, learn to recognize the history of different peoples, and learn to look from a perspective that allows us to understand ourselves, as kind of a meeting of cultures and a root that we have, and the trunk we carry, and to know what we will pass down to our children. The leaves and the tree that are, and what our ancestors have left, will sprout from the root, trunk and leaves, and then bear fruit.



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That is the vision we have of the tree of science, and Mother Nature sends us the message from that perspective. Among each people, and in every territory, we consult the land, and this has happened in various places, in order to harmonize or reclaim the land. And as Misak people, our fundamental mandate of origin is to collaborate with all peoples, not only with the original peoples, but also with those from different nationalities and from other nations. This helps us explore the subject of art, such as weaving.

For us, it's not craftsmanship, it is the living art of the post-commissioning of the peoples. Sometimes, in the West, there is an attempt to reduce us to mere objects with no value unless it's labeled as craftsmanship. However, everything we create in our territory: weaving, bags, our own hats, or everything we have, like our identity, is part, in a sense, of the land. It's not just commercial art, but also spiritual art. Through this, we aim to convey the thought that our ancestors left written on various stones, so that other generations can understand it. I've come to see that Manuel Quintín Lame indigenous art is a means to show our bodies, to show life, and to show the struggles of our elders, like the struggle experienced by the elder Manuel Quintín Lame.

Quintín Lame shows us how, through his struggles, through his resistance, and through his stubbornness, he resisted humiliation within an oppressive state. He never stopped fighting, and that's why his story endures for new generations, because that's how our elders speak; that's how those who knew Manuel Quintín Lame speak.

When the Misak people were about to make their spiritual journey, some elders traveled to the departments of Tolima and Huila, bearing a message: the elder had passed away. The Misak people then made a journey on foot to Tolima and accompanied the elder in his burial. All this has left us a history; our ancestors had a connection with life, which is why they had to accompany him on his deathbed to make a spiritual journey.

Everything is a process of resistance. We resisted in the seventies, just as some *terrazgueros* did, even though the *terrazguería* did not occur until 1971. The forties were



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a more challenging time, due to the social conflict in Colombia, particularly in the department of Cauca, known for its cultural and armed resistance. The main example in the department of Cauca is the cultural resistance, with memory and land always at the core of resistance and reclamation. It's about reclaiming the land to recover everything, as is the case with the Misak people, and in the case of the Nasa people, the fight has remained the same.

Our ancestors say that our Nasa brothers had fought for 200 years with the Spanish, and through that warrior blood, they have shown us that the department of Cauca is not a violent place, but that the oligarchic system of a few has made us violence.

Before, our communities used to engage in a process of mimicry, marking the points of land with metal sheets or creating large holes to establish boundaries. However, during that period, landowners from Cauca noticed that in many areas, they were obtaining wires that today run through the land, connecting many estates, many pieces of lands, or many farmers. They used the wire, but to limit the people, to torture the people.

The first wire that arrived here I believe was brought from Argentina by the largest estates that were built. After that, the landowners used it to parcel out the land and take away the indigenous people's lands that we occupied, using the markers we had, or the stones with lines we had made to indicate that these were our lands.

Thanks to the wire, the landowners built large estates in the department of Cauca, like Guillermo León Valencia. Our ancestors tell us that indigenous people made the markers or sometimes we used to mark limits on the stones to say, "this part belongs to us," "this part belongs to you," but that was difficult for the white people, and for the indigenous communities, there were no borders, nor anything.

When the landowners started buying wire and then proceeded to displace the indigenous peoples from the lands they had been living on, our elders began to wonder, "How can we reclaim the land they took from us and fenced with wire?" So, through that, the elder Manuel Quintín Lam took charge of waging various struggles



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and processes for reclamation in Ortega (Tolima). And in those spaces, indigenous thought gained strength, with the awakening of the communities, guided by Manuel Quintín Lame's ideas. From that time until the present day, there are many wires that used to belong to the estates.

A historical memory that we currently hold in the Gran Cauca del Valle Pubenense reservation consists of many old wires, which were inherited from the landowners. When they left the lands, they couldn't take their wires with them, so they remained for the community and for many peoples, not only for the Misak people.

Today, the wire serves as support for constructing their enclosures. However, a long time ago, when there were no wires, they used the metal sheets that we had created, those walls that the people have built. But they were not boundaries; but living spaces that were built there.

What we aim for with our world view is to develop those ideas, to construct a better narrative through those wires, to reveal how history unfolded and how we were entangled in that wire, so that our history doesn't merely narrate to us; rather, we continue to speak, and it should reflect us and the reality of these peoples' history, because many of them lack a documented history. What we do have is reality, and what I am detailing now is a word from our elders who have spoken to us, our grandparents. This is a narrative that guides us in revealing, both externally and internally, how we will pave the way by removing the wire that they inserted in our thoughts and hearts. But we must remove that wire.

When they reclaimed the land, the *terrazgueros* underwent a process of vindication and the first indigenous movement was created – the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) in the seventies. The Misak, Nasa, and Pijao peoples were great pioneers in the construction of historical memory as an indigenous movement. But there was a big difference among ourselves, in the case of the Misak people, as only five of us joined them from the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca.



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From 1971 to 1975, because of political differences and a traditional way of thinking that we are obliged to follow, mostly in the political sphere, the Nasa people have a stronger connection to their ancestral warrior bloodline. Thus, the Misak people and the Nasa people did not understand each other. As a result, the indigenous movement was born, united by a common belief in the importance of Mother Earth and the reclamation of indigenous rights.

This entire process began in the department of Cauca, not just the indigenous movement, but thanks to the farmers' movement, the indigenous movement began in 1965, when the region was embroiled in a conflict between liberals and conservatives. The department of Cauca has sometimes been liberal, sometimes conservative. Many farmers are the result of cultural vindication, owing to the efforts of the elders who continue to play a significant role even today, like the elder Misak, Trino Morales, the pioneer of the CRIC.

The book *No one kills me* tells his story: how the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca was created, how these elders slept in the mountains and became victims of persecution because they couldn't sleep peacefully at home. It was much like today, with a lot of persecution. As a result, they started dismantling the estates to reclaim their lands. Many of them found vindication through cooperatives, which were closely tied to their resistance in regaining their land.

A case worth highlighting is that of the Las Delicias cooperative, which is in the Guambía reservation, in the municipality of Silvia (Cauca). That was a significant example; it was a starting point to reclaim lands, although not many, but we also managed to recover our history. This was, let's say, the thinking of the indigenous movement. Through this approach, the idea was to create various forms of knowledge and education, which took shape in different ways as we progressed towards the Constituent Assembly. Various communities from across the nation participated, and it is a right that we have secured in the Constitution.



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Our elders say that the struggle for rights in the Constitution was arduous and challenging, and even required deaths to get far in that struggle. From all of that emerged political vindication, a social and cultural vindication of the indigenous peoples in Colombia. It also produced the indigenous art of Manuel Quintín Lame, as we aim to show that art serves as a form of expression and a reclamation of history – the untold history that the academy, universities, and school never wanted to tell. In Latin America, most education is not for advancing, but for erasing the historical memory of these peoples.

But for us, from this vindication, it is crucial to continue building the historical memory within the territories, and to establish an alternative education that allows us to grasp our unique perspective. This entails further clarifying and comprehending the indigenous art of Manuel Quintín Lame from our experiences and spiritual environment. It's about understanding through nature and through the human being to prevent internal disputes, all while fostering ongoing learning, awareness, and nurturing a new generation that can understand through art and expression. Understanding through understanding, spirituality, *mambear* the coca leaf, *mambear* the word, and *mambear* the medicine of various peoples.

For us, it's important to be able to reflect upon our feeling with nature, our feeling of life, our feeling with our families. That is what spirituality teaches us, that is what nature teaches us. Everything in nature teaches us to appreciate our families, to value our children, to value women, and for women to value men. There is room for all of us on this earth, in a society guided by a world view of equity and understanding. This is the great task that our ancestors, our elders, passed down through oral tradition. Today, we continue to uncover this wisdom through spirituality and in the historical narratives they have left in the stones.

For us, the entire Earth possesses a spirit, and everything within that spirit represents an understanding. Yet, to achieve this, we must make an offering and a payment, and refresh our bodies to harmonize with nature. If we fail to make an offering to nature, if we neglect this payment, she punishes us. This is why there are environmental



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disasters, that is why there are avalanches, that is why there is rain, and that is why there are storms. This is why we wonder why the human beings that live on these lands have not made payment, have not thanked the earth, have not thanked the rain, have not thanked the wind, have not thanked the sun, have not thanked the night or the day.

The truth is that if we do not give thanks, we are punished; that is what spirituality shows us. That is why we, the Misak people, the Nasa people, all peoples, offer what we consume to nature; that is what we do. First, we make a payment, which is to give thanks; we express gratitude to the wind, the sun, the rain, the night, and the day since they are dualities. If there is a day, there is a night and a new dawn, and the dawning of time is the dawning from generation to generation, allowing us to witness the construction of the historical memory that has preserved us as a living history – our Mother Nature or our natural language.

All of this originated with the Misak people, to whom I belong, as it is a lengthy endeavor for us. It begins with our journey to the *páramo* to gather plants, a process we undertake with great respect. In our culture, when someone passes away or when our mother has her period, we are forbidden to leave the house, as it may displease the spirits. These practices are manifestations of the law of origin that has always been upheld in our culture.

Following the principles of the law of origin, during menstruation, women must rest for four days, since this is sacred for us. Women are sacred, and that's why they remain at home for four days to prevent the illness from affecting them or their families. This practice shows the West that for us walking is not walking because I want to, because I feel like it, or because I am going to see nature; no. We walk to connect with nature, to speak to it, to ask for forgiveness, not as tourists.

Tourism can be good, but tourists who come must come to build and value their family, since nature is about valuing family. If we come only as tourists, we are causing harm to both ourselves and to nature. That's why nature can respond harshly to us because



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nature isn't good or bad. When a storm comes, then comes a storm, or when an avalanche comes, it sweeps everything away. That's why we say that to have harmony with nature, we must learn to make offerings, ask the mountain for permission, request the river's consent before crossing, and seek permission before felling a tree. All this is part of our world view, something that is very difficult for the West to understand. They can understand it, but only with their own scientific logic – a scientific logic that says, "If it's scientific, we approve, but if it's spoken, we don't believe in it." What we predominantly practice is spirituality, something that has been passed down from generation to generation by our ancestors.

This is a real history that we create, a living history of weaving. For us, what I have here is not craftsmanship, what I have here is memory. When we weave this, we are weaving life, we are weaving family. For us, when we make this *ruana*, it is not because we want to, but because there is a memory here. That is what the seven colors of the rainbow represent for us, it is all part of spirituality. We don't perceive it as handicrafts, but as a form of cultural expression. Everything we have or use, the *chumbe*, the women's *chumbe* or the women's *anaco*, since the men's *anaco* is different, holds a specific purpose in our world view. Participating in the making of one's own hat is to be part of the historical memory of our people, our family, and our territory.

That is why in our language we say *nupirθ*, which means the big, big, big territory, that is, the big house. It is the big house that welcomes us all without discrimination. All of this is crucial for us. That's why it's vital to comprehend how our history is inscribed in the hat, in the *anaco*, and in the women's *anaco*, as each item is a part of diverse narratives shared by the elder women.

Many use them to store remedies, many use them for their belongings, and each item has its place. Some items are meant for medicinal use, so I can't use them for anything other than medicine. Others are crafted for agriculture and are larger, while some serve to carry things, to purchase supplies, or to carry personal belongings back home.



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When we keep something, we are keeping the memory. That's why for us, orality and the expression of our land are essential. They represent life itself, the expression of nature. As we create stitches, all this takes form. It's not merely about crafting the stitch, but for us, it's a daily process. Here, the next stitch, with two or three turns, depends on what I'm contemplating. Thus, everything is an integral part of our world view, just like the Nasa brothers as well.

And that's the part in which, as a traditional doctor, I've been supporting Manuel Quintín Lame in indigenous art. It is a unique process that involves various groups, including the Nasa people, the Yanacona people, and other peoples. They are going to accompany our colleague, and I've been accompanying him for around six years. These processes are long and very complex to understand.

Elder Julio Caldon. Traditional doctor of the Kokonuko people. Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural. Popayán, Cauca.

What is meant by art?

Art is to feel, to dream; art is to observe, to taste, to touch. Why does it encompass all of these exercises? Because to make art, you have to be connected with nature. You have to be connected with the environment, with space. And for that, then, we have to know how to listen, how to touch, how to taste; we have to know the environment we are in.

Art is, in itself, the complementation of each of these senses; it is not something that is strange, it is not something that is different. Art is how to awaken all these senses, how to capture them in a figure, how to construct an element. For example, a fabric, a bag, a *ruana*, a *chumbo* with writing; for example, a house with all its thoughts, its windows, its doors. We must also consider its shape: if it is square, if it is rectangular, if it is circular; why that shape? Because that is the true written sense that this conglomerate of initiatives has to see to feel true art. Art is written from symbols, from figures that exist in the space where we live, where we build life; art is even life itself.



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We are a work of art, aren't we? I think we are a work of art similar to ourselves. Why to ourselves? Because we come from two human beings. It's such a beautiful planting that as it grows, it turns into a finely sculpted work of art, and we must find that refinement in our way of thinking, in our way of observing as we make choices. And that physical fabric of people keeps getting bigger, doesn't it?

So this is, simply, a work of art seen from the perspective of a slightly eccentric indigenous person, because there might be alternative viewpoints in other communities, don't you think? Some thought differently.

What would constitute a contemporary indigenous artistic practice?

Contemporary practice is weak; in other words, today our young people, our children, have lost the sense of what I mentioned earlier: of feeling, touching, listening, smelling and tasting. They have completely lost that because they go anywhere, they sit anywhere, they stand anywhere, they stay anywhere.

Nowadays, they don't walk with the feeling of walking, but instead because they have to walk more, not because they have to go walking, feeling. Unfortunately, from a cultural perspective, we are losing this practice. As a result, this knowledge resides primarily within the minds of the elders, those of us who take the time to interpret the signs and read nature.

Today, when you ask a young person about their knowledge of reading the clouds, it is clear that they do not interpret them. They don't find drawings, they do not find symbols in the afternoon, in the night, in each of their spaces, in each of those figures that are presented to us as natural art. They don't understand them. That's why we can still assert that on that side we are rapidly losing the exercise of the contemporary in art, right? Art is falling behind us. So, who are the ones currently engaged in cultivating this practice of preserving the fabric? The grandmothers. The rest of us weave. For instance, this morning, I watched young people weaving a braid for a hat, although this is more of a seedling exercise rather than a tradition that everyone practices within their households and families. We do it because we are supporting an



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educational or transformative initiative, but this transformation should also lead us to rethink our lives.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves how much we are losing from each of these themes of art-making, which originate from writing and constructing, rather than from the fabric of life.

Is it possible to think of art in its Western meaning alongside the cultural production of indigenous peoples, with the aim of building a more inclusive and respectful society that is aware of the particularity of its histories and cultural genealogy?

We could achieve this by considering our own rights, because if we wait for a constitutional right, it will not be possible. In other words, we can make everything possible if we, ourselves, legislate to make all the requirements we want in the field of art from all points of view. To do this, we must position each of these elements, but to position them, we need to practice extensively within the family and the core of our living space. If we do not do this, no form of power, be it human, political, or economic, will be able to get us out of there. If we do not take ownership of it, we will not be able to strengthen it, as over time, it will gradually weaken, and others will surely take possession of this artistic knowledge. We do have art and traditions, but we sometimes confine ourselves to the notion that it belongs exclusively to our community.

Many would feel embarrassed to go out and play the flute in Caldas Park, because in Popayán, artists only go out to play music in December. I don't see them playing out there on the street during other months of the year. Perhaps at Easter, but it's not a permanent thing.

On the other hand, in Ecuador, for example, there are always artists in the streets and groups playing music, demonstrating the true art held within the communities. We often neglect this practice and do not take it with us.

In the past, you could observe our traditions on the road, in the assembly; people would visit the doctor, the health center, and there they would weave. They would go to other places, and later, they'd take out their bags and sit down to weave; no time



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was wasted. They were always writing on that fabric because there was no time to waste in that space of continuing to build art through that space.

However, today, I reiterate, the contemporary matter is screwed; it's easier to have a cell phone and be doing other things instead of creating fabric, or weaving fabric from there. That's what I have to say regarding this.

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How can we talk about an aesthetic tradition in Colombia, overcoming the fracture left by the conquest?

The impact of the Conquest is something so strong that it eradicated many things, not only art: it eradicated the language, it eradicated music, it eradicated the different ways of living in indigenous territories.

The Conquest was something that practically crushed us. Fortunately, those of us who managed to avoid that cultural crushing are the ones striving to revive it today from there, from that great eradication. In those times there were only a few of us, and while they came close, they didn't manage to eradicate us. The few who remain have taken up the responsibility of sustaining our cultural, linguistic, medical, and interpretive traditions within our living spaces; they have done it from there.

The influence of the Conquest was something very strong, and it is still having an impact. Otherwise, we would not be so caught up in issues related to technologies, with the invasion of so much that reaches us today.

Currently, there is a significant concern in Colombia: the rising cost of household groceries. However, this should not affect us, as we have our territory, we have our own seeds, and we have all that story we occasionally put out in the public square. But when we go to the territories, that story is not so true, and it becomes plain, unpalatable, because we do not have it in reality.

Elder Eduar Gil of the Yanakuna people. Popayán, Cauca.



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We found that life of nature. We found that energy that remains youthful, that persists in the walk, which we also call *biche*. *Biche*, filled with all that vitality, with all that life-giving energy that transmits life to the universe, and, as such, to us.

We have the next color represented as female *mamayaco*, female water, and the spirituality of that clarity, of that purity. The next color is male water; there we have the male-female duality. And the next color is *ayahuasca*, which represents the spiritual path of *yachariñame*, extending through the universe. This spiral embodies the energy of stars that come, and reaches this place we call Earth, planet Earth. It continues its journey towards the nucleus, where the space of the spiritual fire resides.

This is what *ayahuasca* is.

Just as the universe guides us, messages arrive moment by moment. It can be from the wind's song, the wind's dance, the sparks of the grandfather, the fire of the grandmother, the fire of the son, the fire of the daughters. It is in these moments that our elders share messages with us on the path of indigenous art, the art of life, the *yachan yan*, and the ancestral wisdom of our peoples.

They will continue and we will continue following this path, to reach each one of those thoughts, those countless hearts within every body; like each body of a tree, body of a stone, body of every being, giving a message. Our messengers of the Earth shall therefore continue, our elder messengers of the Earth. And this is the voice of the elders of the sea, who arrived together. As the elder already said, they arrived together. This is how they offer a spiritual embrace to each of you on this journey, and this embrace will reach where the runes reside, where a being, called people, called person, man and woman, is found.



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Yu paichani, we follow the path to the realm of water, and then to the realm of the *tulpa*. They will then return to their own space, and we will continue on this path with these messages of life and joy. *Jallalla, jallalla, jallalla*.

Who will walk with them? If there is somebody who would like to walk with them, pick them up.

We are going to go for a little walk with the drum, and then we will go out; go and pick up the ones you feel, the ones you feel...

Be careful.

Don't worry.

We'll go all the way around.

Ah.

We'll go all the way around again.

Yupaychani, tata, mamá yaku, mamá killa, pacha mamita, nina tata, nina mamá, amawtakuna, tata kuna, mamá kuna, yupaychani, yupaychani.

We have to thank everyone and all the spiritual beings of the universe, of *pacha*, for the direction to this path of art. The path of art is already *chariñam a yaya*. The path of ancestral wisdom of the peoples, for life in harmony and balance. It is more than a school, it is more than a university; it is the journey of encountering the origins of each people. It's about being guided by the messages bestowed upon us by our spiritual beings, our fathers, and our mothers. This education is rooted in practical experience,



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because he felt, he conversed, he understood, he knew how to guide. At this moment, he is guiding. He, and many other fathers and mothers: Manuel Quintín Lame.



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