



***Womb of the Earth:
Cosmovisions of the Rainforest***

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WOMB OF THE EARTH: COSMOVISIONS OF THE RAINFOREST

—Manuela Well-Off-Man

Womb of the Earth: Cosmivision of the Rainforest is MoCNA's first exhibition featuring contemporary female Indigenous artists from Brazil. The exhibition provides a platform for these artists to share their works with an international audience and voice their concerns about challenges their communities face. They live in Brazil's tropical forests, namely the Amazon and Atlantic Forest, and unlike many of their predominantly male counterparts in urban art circles, they often lack access to art galleries or museums. Their artworks illustrate threats to their life, culture, and homeland through deforestation, illegal mining, agriculture and infrastructure developments, violations of cultural rights, and lack of access to justice. *Womb of the Earth* explores their

cultures' cosmivisions, and the importance of Brazil's rainforests, one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, for these Indigenous communities' physical and cultural survival, as well as the role of female artists in the struggle to preserve their homeland. The exhibition is co-curated by Brazilian Indigenous curator Cristine Takuá (Maxakali) and artist/curator Anita Ekman, in consultation with Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), and introduces three Indigenous female artist collectives. Among them are Tiriyo, Katxuyana, Txikiyana, and Desana artists; a Tukano, Awaete (Assurini) collective; as well as a group of Huni Kuin (Kashinawa) artists. Artists from the Tiriyo,



AMITIKATXI female artist collective (Tiriyo, Katxuyana, and Txikiyana), *The Forest is Our Future, Which Makes Us Grow*, 2021, beads, red dye, fabric, 64"x 61". Image courtesy of MoCNA

Katxuyana, Txikiyana, and Cecília de Santarém (Iepé) collaborated on an elaborate, delicate textile panel titled *The Forest is Our Future, Which Makes Us Grow*, depicting a Sumaúma (also known as kapok) tree. Growing up to 230 feet high, it is one of the largest trees in the Amazon rainforest, connecting sky and earth. The wall hanging is adorned with intricate beadwork featuring complex abstract patterns, animals such as jaguar, deer, birds, scorpions, crabs, insects, and flowers on a vibrant red fabric, often worn as skirts on feast days. The composition integrates the lush, beaded flora and fauna into the tree's rounded crown and enormous buttressed trunk, and signifies the women's profound understanding of the interdependence of all life in the rainforest.

The Forest is Our Future is complemented by a video that, akin to the beaded wall hanging, showcases

the collaborative efforts of these female artists. Both, the video and the beadwork, underscore their commitment to sharing knowledge about forest preservation and maintaining a harmonious existence with nature as part of their culture. This bears significance, particularly considering that Brazil's Atlantic Rainforest has experienced a loss of approximately 92%. Deforestation is closely linked to the history of Brazil's colonization.



Cristine Takuá (Maxakali), Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Carlos Papa (Guarani Mbya), Anita Ekman, and Shezad Dawood, *Hybrid Futures. Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea*. Episode 8, 2022, film, 17:33 min.

The film *Leviathan* addresses this critical issue and was produced by curators Cris Takuá, Sandra Benites, and Anita Ekman in collaboration with Carlos Papa and Shezad Dawood. Guarani co-curator

Sandra Benites declares at the outset of the video *Tupi Valongo – Kunhanguereko* (*The Bodies of Women*), that, “The Earth is a living body, she is Nhandecy eté, our mother.” Both videos, *Tupi Valongo–Kunhanguereko* and *Leviathan*, conceptually shape the entire exhibition.

Transformation in Marajoara/ Marajó, Wauja/Waurá, and Dessana Ceramic Art

Another component of this exhibition features a selection of precolonial ceramic works, on loan from the Denver Art Museum, and crafted by artists from Marajó Island, the largest fluvial island globally, situated at the confluence of the Amazon River and the Atlantic. For centuries researchers from the Western world attributed ceramic art from this region to other cultures, often overlooking or dismissing the reality that the Amazon and Atlantic Forest were home to sophisticated civilizations. These societies practiced advanced forest management that contributed to the

biodiversity of the rainforest for over 12 thousand years. Inhabiting an expansive territory defined by tropical grasslands and rainforests, strongly influenced by oceanic and river connections and seasonal floodings, the Marajoara people built monumental earthen mounds for residences and ceremonial purposes that stood prominently in the flooded plains, often being perceived as natural islands. The Marajoara ceramics showcased in this exhibition serve as compelling evidence of the culture’s rich artistic and cultural traditions.

Within the diverse array of Amazonian ceramic styles, Marajoara stands out as it incorporates an extensive range of decorative techniques. These include the application of contrasting red and black paint on white slipped surfaces, as well as the use of modeling, incising, and excising to craft intricate designs in relief. What sets Marajó ceramics apart,

above all, are their intricate geometric patterns, often in the form of spiraling or interlocking designs. While some pieces incorporate animal or figurative motifs, abstraction dominates. The intricate iconographic elements include human portraits and animals, such as double-headed snakes, scorpions, lizards, turtles, and birds, which often come together to form larger, human-like figures. Some of the most complex works showcase a combination of a variety of ceramic techniques and motifs, emphasizing the culture’s high level of artistic sophistication.

In contrast to Andean or Mesoamerican pottery, Amazonian pre-Columbian ceramics seldom depict plants. Instead, the emphasis lies on the connection between humans and animals, underscoring the cultures’ worldview based on the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the natural environment.

Additionally, the representation of bodily forms in Marajoara ceramics aligns with principles often found in animistic societies, where bodies are perceived as inherently transitional and transformative.¹ For example, shamans in these cultures possess the ability to modify their state. They can change into animals or spirits by altering their physical forms or manifesting as hybrid entities, facilitating communication with beings from alternative realms.²

Archeologist Cristiana Barreto explains, “In Amazonian imagery, and Marajoara ceramics in particular, it is common that bodies are not fully represented, inviting viewers to complete the figure in their imagination, as a way to allude to the different shapes and forms in which a body can appear. Human bodies formed by parts of animal bodies are also common, invoking the possibilities of humans and animals to (ex)change body forms.”³



Unknown Marajoara artist, *Jar with relief designs*, 400–1400 CE. Slip, painted, and carved ceramic 16.75"x 11.375", Denver Art Museum Collection: Gift of the Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.15. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

A good example is the 16 3/4-inch-tall jar on loan from the Denver Art Museum (400-1400 CE). The straight-walled ceramic vessel features remarkably complex and intricate interwoven designs created in low and high relief. As a result, it is sometimes challenging for the viewer to decipher the imagery of these kinds of ceramics. As Barreto points out, "Usually, they are completely covered by convoluted designs, in a geometric composition scheme, where figures are unfolded, or mirrored, into two or four fields around the vessel. They guide the viewer's

eyes through meandering and spiraling labyrinths, where sometimes one can recognize a snake, a face, or limbs with digits but struggles to find a complete figure. A visual interplay between figure and background increases the visual confusion and is often obtained by carving through a painted surface (usually red) to reveal the underlying light color of the clay."⁴ It is also often difficult to determine the exact purposes of these jars.

The Marajoara ceramics on view in this exhibition are characterized by the interplay between figure and background, depictions of ambiguous body-like forms, and skillful techniques of concealing and revealing elements, which encourage viewers to perceive images beyond the visible and material, indicating connections to mythical, spiritual, or alternative realms. By alluding to these alternate

worlds, the Marajoara artworks convey wisdom about ancient times into the contemporary, preserving cultural knowledge that encompasses shifts in perspective. The Marajoara ceramics illustrate how this knowledge is firmly embedded in the cultural traditions of these societies.



Kapulupeno Waurá, (*Wauja/Waurá*), *Yupetaim*, 2023, clay, charcoal paint, natural varnish, 13.5"x 5.5"x 5". Image courtesy of MoCNA.

The ancient Indigenous concept of transformation is still evident in the ceramics by contemporary artists from Brazil's rainforests. For example, the ceramic animals by Wauja (*Waurá*) artists Kapulupeno Waurá and Makalo Waurá allude to transformation as part of their culture's cosmivision. Ekman explains, "To the Indigenous peoples of the South American rainforests,

bodies are essentially mutable...Within the forests, humans and nonhumans constantly trade the skins of spirits amongst themselves and they may even inhabit different bodies. Art is intrinsic to this process, the living legacy of the connection of all forest-dwelling beings."⁵ The designs of Wauja (*Waurá*) ceramic animals represent the interconnectedness of art, culture, nature, and belief systems of this community. "Snakes, for instance, especially those with beautiful designs composed of graphic motifs on their skins, are, for many Indigenous peoples, the true teachers of art," states Ekman.⁶

References to snakes can be found in the portrayal of Kamalu Hai, the mythical snake-like being whose back is filled with singing pots and who taught ceramic art to the Wauja. Similarly, snake designs are also used to represent the young Arakuni, who transforms into a serpent in Waujo mythology. In the



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá), *Arakuni III*, 2023, clay, charcoal paint, natural varnish, 15.75" x 3" x 2". Image courtesy of MoCNA.

Indigenous cultures of Brazil's tropical forests, humans and nonhumans can trade skins and inhabit various bodies. Wauja (Waurá) artists including Kapulupeno Waurá and Makalo Waurá also create other ceramic animal figures, such as anteaters, inspired by their immediate natural environment and Wauja mythology and reflecting the interconnectedness between humans, animals, and supernatural beings.

The exhibition also features paintings and mixed media art by Tukano artist Larissa Ye'p a, whose art reflects on cultural practices related to women's roles in her community. Art historian Claudia Mattos Avolese explains, "A woman



Larissa Ye'p a (Tukano), *Corpo Espiritual* (Spiritual Body), 2023, acrylic ink on paper, 8.2" x 11.4". Image courtesy of MoCNA.

plays a central role in Tukano cosmology, in which Grandmother of the Universe is the Earth itself and was the one to blow humanity into life after Grandfather of the Universe failed to do so."⁷ Ye'p a's vibrant painting *Corpo Espiritual* illustrates how the biological transformation process of menstruation is considered spiritual in her culture. The colorful circles and spiral shapes symbolize the renewing of a woman's body and spirit as part of the process. Each time a woman goes from one cycle to the next, she enters a new cycle of energy.



Puí Dessana (Dessana) *Uhuri-Jabuti* (Amazon Turtle) pen holder, 2023, Clay with caraipé (ashes from the Amazon specific tree), Collection of the Artist

Artist Puí Dessana (Dessana) created an *Amazon Turtle* (*Uhuri-Jabuti*), which is revered as a sacred animal among the Dessana people. The turtle is seen as a cosmological being, representing the connection between different realms or dimensions. The turtle's ability to retreat into its shell and emerge anew is symbolic of transformation and renewal. Puí Dessana's ceramics are contemporary in design while following the traditional Tukano technique of meticulously burnishing and firing the ceramics to achieve a shiny black surface. The clay contains ashes from the siliceous caraipé tree, enhancing the strength and sheen of the

ceramic. The use of Amazon caraipé tree ashes for the clay reflects not only technical considerations but also a cultural and environmental relationship that shapes the artistry and functionality of the ceramics.

Transformation through Body Paint

Womb of the Earth showcases ancestral art related to women in the Brazilian forests. A digital photograph portrays one of the earliest depictions of a pregnant woman in Brazilian rock art, situated in the Serra da Capivara National Park within the dry tropical forest zone of Caatinga, Brazil. Pregnancy, a transformative aspect of the human body, holds significance in ancient Indigenous Brazilian art, evident in petroglyphs and ceramics. The photograph also underscores the importance of body painting for many Indigenous cultures in Brazil by juxtaposing a rock art of a male figure with painted patterns with the body art

of Tariano actress Sandra Nanayna. Nanayna, who imparts her knowledge of the 12,000-year-old rock art to her community in the Amazon's Negro River area, collaborated with curator and artist Anita Ekman in this performance. They utilize an ancient body painting technique employing ceramic stamps and urucum pigment. Many Indigenous cultures of the Brazilian tropical forest, including the Katxuyana, Awaete (Assurini), and Huni Kuin (Kashinawa) share stories, where snakes and other beings of the rainforests taught them the patterns and designs, seen in the body art and paintings in this exhibition.

The theme of body painting is further explored in the works of artists Ibatsai Judite Carlos Da Silva Freitas (Huni Kuin/ Kashinawa), the Collective Apaminktaj, and Kumé Assurini (Awaete/Assurini). Kumé Assurini reinterprets the genipapo and charcoal body painting tradition of the Awaete by creating acrylic on



Kume Assurini (Awaete/Assurini), *Taygawaete (Body of the True Soul)*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 59" x 33". Image courtesy of MoCNA.

canvas paintings inspired by traditional body painting motifs observed on women from her community. Assurini also worked with designer Carla Romano and Timei Assurini to render traditional body painting patterns in acrylic on fabric, to further explore the themes of the human body and Awaete body art, its geometric designs, symbolism, and connection to the spirit world.

What unites these artworks is the artists' profound understanding of the close relationship between humans's body and soul with their surrounding nature and

the supernatural world. In many Brazilian Indigenous cultures's belief systems, the rainforest is the origin of life on Earth—protecting it is a key subject in these women's art. *Womb of the Earth* delves into the cosmovisions of communities from the Amazon and Atlantic Forest, examining the interrelation of humans with the rainforest and its animals. The focus of *Womb of the Earth* on female Indigenous art from the tropical forests, including Marajoara ceramics, made from clay collected from the ground centuries ago, and works inspired by women's body art, illustrates the deep link between the female body and the Earth in their capacity to generate life.

Nature has shaped the art and culture of these Indigenous communities, and the animals and plants of the Amazon and Atlantic Forest have taught them the art of coexisting in equilibrium. *Womb of the Earth* shares their wisdom

and empowers their voices through these women's artworks. The exhibition also aims to introduce these female Indigenous artists from the Brazilian rainforests to wide audiences, including the contemporary art field.

Endnotes:

¹ Carlo Fausto and David Rodgers, "Body-Artifact," in *Art Effects: Image, Agency, and Ritual in Amazonia*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 29–72.

² According to anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, many dangers can cause reversals of body forms, with humans turning into animals and vice versa. Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere: Four Lectures Given in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, February-March 1998," *HAU Masterclass Series vol.1, HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (2012): 47–48.

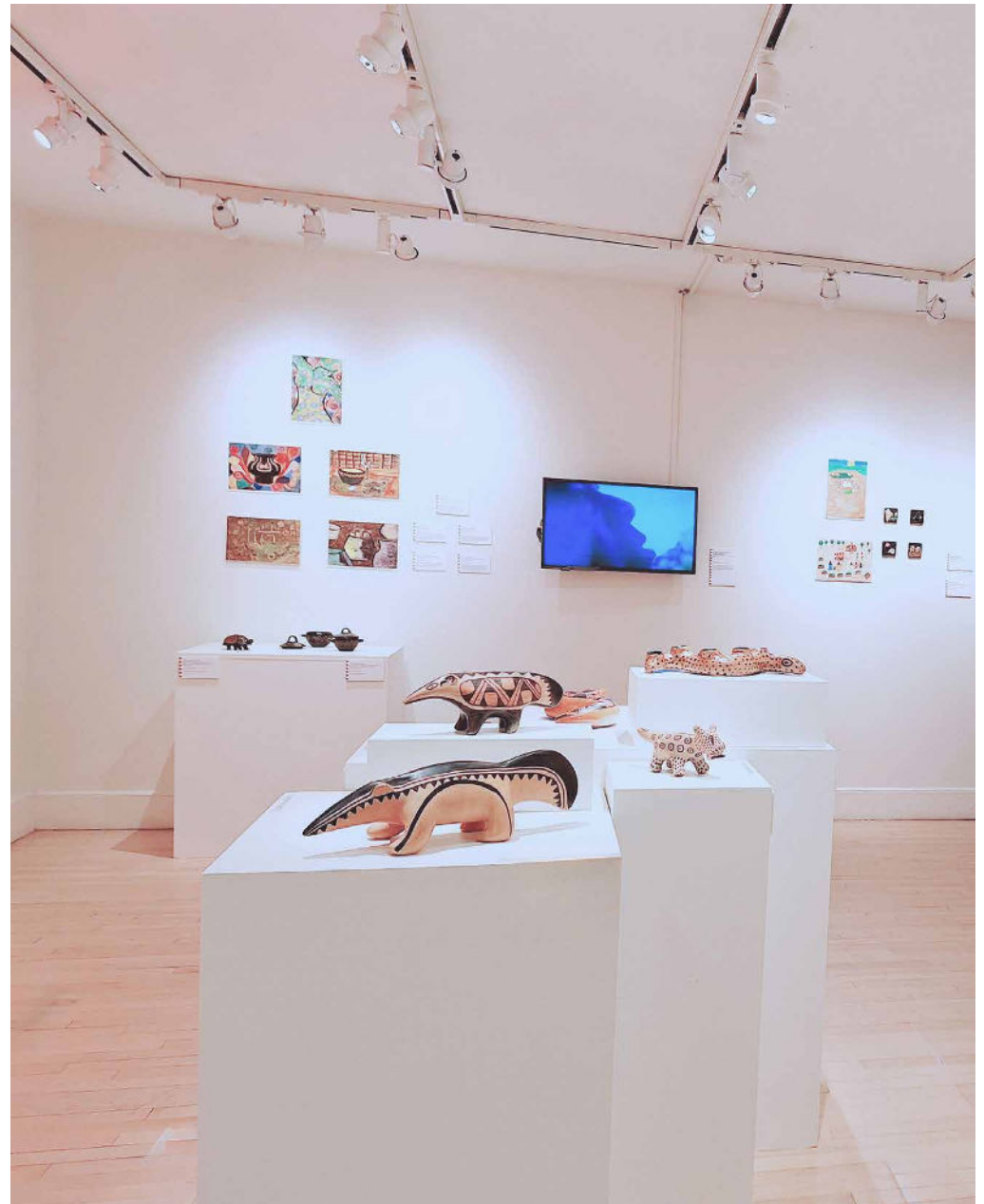
³ Cristiana Barreto, "The Marajoara Image Factory." In this publication.

⁴ Cristiana Barreto. In this publication

⁵ Anita Ekman, "The Womb of the Earth." In this publication.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Claudia Mattos, "Inhabiting the Womb of the Earth." In this publication.



MoCNA gallery image of *Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest*



THE WOMB OF THE EARTH INDIGENOUS COSMOVISIONS OF THE RAINFORESTS

–Anita Ekman, Cristine Takuá (Maxakali), and Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva)

*The Earth is a living body,
It is the body of Nhandecy Eté,
Our primeval mother.
When we walk the Earth
We tread on the body of a
woman.*

–Sandra Benites

*The abstract Amerindian
chimaera, more than the image
of something, is the
representation of the
relationships expressed by the
image. (...)*

*In Amazonian art, the lines draw
attention to what connects,
and not what separates distinct
bodies and beings. It is an art in-
between-two: connecting human
beings and animals on the basis
that they have designs, as well
as visible and invisible sides, for
that same reason, and pointing
to the relationship between*

*complementary dyads such as
man and woman, human being
and spirit. That which is drawn,
more than its shape, is the
relationship that connects and
constitutes them.*

–Carlos Severi and Els Lagrou ¹

**The Earth welcomes us, feeds
us, protects us, and gives
us every condition to live in
harmony with all the beings
that share this sacred territory
with us. With great generosity,
the Earth provides shelter
to thousands of animals,
plants, and mineral beings
which, like a big web, interact
and collaborate towards the
transformative flow of life.**

The hot and humid tropical
forests are like the womb of
the Earth, as they harbor the
biggest diversity of lifeforms
on the planet.²

Building on this metaphor,
this exhibition is born with
the intent that the world may
awaken more and more to
the importance of looking
up to and caring for the body
and knowledge of women,

especially the forest mother
artists who collectively
struggle each day to ensure
the continuity of the diversity
of life in the world.

Thus, for this exhibition,
our goal has been to bring
together the cosmovisions
of different Indigenous
peoples regarding the origin
of life, investigating the role
of women in art and in the
history of the body-territory³
of Brazilian tropical forests:
the Amazon and the Atlantic
Forest.

The works featured here
are the result of efforts⁴
to introduce collectives
of Indigenous women,
who reside in the Brazilian
Amazon and Atlantic Forest,
to the contemporary art field,
with the belief that art has
the power to transform the
human body, and therefore
also our territory (land.)
More and more, we need
to build partnerships
throughout the world that
will help us to keep walking
and moving forward with

ancient wisdom in a constant
flux of sharing and sensitive
interactions with all lifeforms
in this womb of the Earth.

This exhibit is the truthful
outcome of a partnership
between women from around
the world who joined one
another to let the Sapukai
("Shout" in Guarani) of the
forest be heard, the scream,
the moan of pain and strength⁵
of women who bring life into
the world.

The Womb, the Art of Transformation of Bodies.

The womb is the space that
welcomes the transformation
of bodies. To the Indigenous
peoples of South America
rainforests, bodies are
essentially mutable.

**In the forest, many creative
beings dwell, and the guardian
spirits of everything that
dwells in it are watching us.**

Within the forests, humans and
nonhumans constantly trade
the skins of spirits amongst
themselves and they may even
inhabit different bodies.

Art is intrinsic to this process, the living legacy of the connection of all forest-dwelling beings.

Snakes, for instance, especially those with beautiful designs composed of graphic motifs on their skins, are, for many



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá), Arakuni, 2023, Red clay ceramic with charcoal paint and natural varnish, Edition 3/5, Collection of the Artist. Image courtesy of MoCNA.

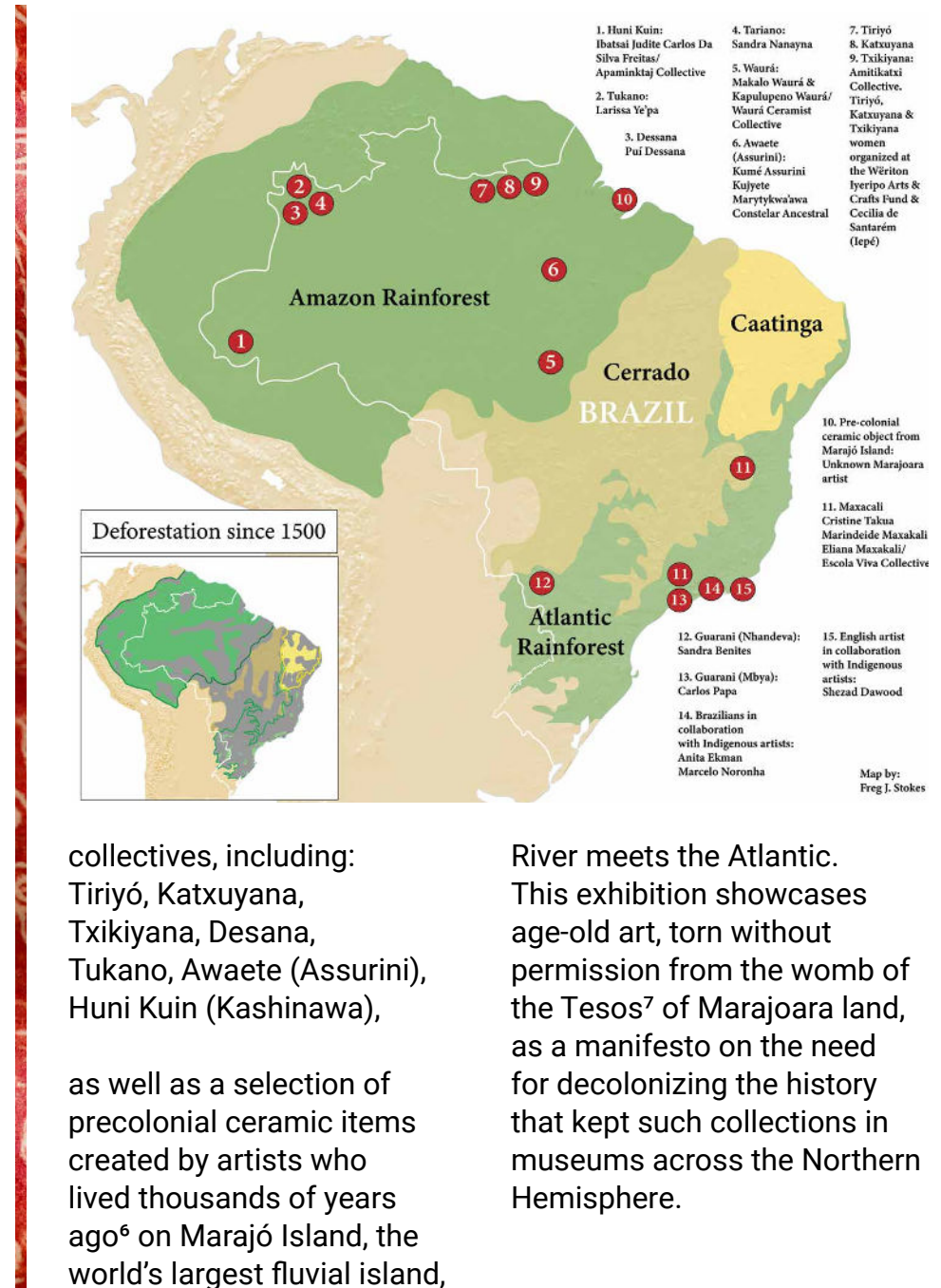
Indigenous peoples, the true teachers of art. They are the ones that have taught, ever since the Time of Origin, the exquisite graphic patterns seen in Huni Kuin (Kashinawa) body paintings and fabrics, featured in this exhibiton in the work of **Ibatsai Judite Carlos Da Silva Freitas**, who has rekindled the wisdom of ancient designs (Kenes) taught by the Boa so that it won't be forgotten. References of snakes are also included in the representation of the master protector of clay,

Kama lu Hai, the serpent with singing pots who taught ceramic-making to the Wauja, as well as in depictions of the young Arakuni, the serpent whose body is replete with songs.

Thus, in this exhibition, we have sought to evoke, through a set of artworks in different mediums, the voices and teachings of not just the forest mother women artists, but also the presence of their grandmothers the trees, birds, snakes, fish, and enchanted beings that have taught Indigenous peoples the art of coexisting in equilibrium, respecting the diversity in this dense web of life that pulsates deep in the womb of the Earth.

The Diversity of Life in Art

The diversity that is the true symbol of forests is also seen in Indigenous languages. Some 305 Indigenous languages are spoken in present-day Brazil. This exhibition features the work of Amazon-based Indigenous women



collectives, including: Tiriyo, Katxuyana, Txikiyana, Desana, Tukano, Awaete (Assurini), Huni Kuin (Kashinawa), as well as a selection of precolonial ceramic items created by artists who lived thousands of years ago⁶ on Marajó Island, the world's largest fluvial island, located where the Amazon

River meets the Atlantic. This exhibition showcases age-old art, torn without permission from the womb of the Tesos⁷ of Marajoara land, as a manifesto on the need for decolonizing the history that kept such collections in museums across the Northern Hemisphere.



Anita Ekman, *Ochre Marajo - Urn of Live*, 2021, *Project Time of Origin* with Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva) and Anita Ekman in Ethnography Museum of Berlin Digital photograph on photo rag paper, Collection of the Artist

The digital photographs seen alongside the archaeological artifacts were created by exhibition curators Anita Ekman and Sandra Benites, who tapped into the concept of re-matriation to provide fresh perspectives on museum collections, such as the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP Landmann Collection), and the Denver Art Museum featured in this exhibition. Particular emphasis has been placed on the subject of pregnancy, of the mutating female body, within this tradition.

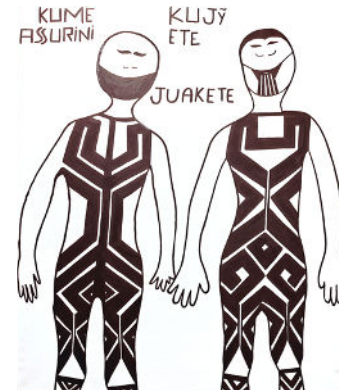
The ancestral art associated with women from South American forests is featured

in this show, in the digital photograph of one of the earliest representations of a pregnant woman in Brazilian rock art, located in the endemic Brazilian forest: the Caatinga. This photograph also emphasizes the importance of body painting for Indigenous peoples by juxtaposing the ochre rock art of male body featuring body paint with the body painting on Indigenous actress Sandra Nanayna, a great connoisseur of the teachings of the rock-people⁸ among her people in the Amazon's Negro River area. In a performance alongside the curator and artist Anita Ekman, Nanayna employed an age-old painting technique revisited by Ekman using ceramic stamps also featured in this exhibition.



Anita Ekman and Sandra Nanayna, *Ceramic body stamps*, 2023, Ceramic, Collection of the Artist

The stamps that transform the body (a technology that emerged in the Brazilian Amazon 6,600 years Before Present and then spread to other regions and cultures, such as the Jama-Coaque in the Andes and the Mayans and Aztecs in Mesoamerica) are part of the exhibition's public interactive art and learning experiences.



Kume Assurini (Awaete/Assurini), *Kujy rarywa ete-juakete I (Soul of the real man)*, 2021, Fabric paint (acrylic) on canvas, Collection of the Artists Image courtesy of MoCNA.

The topic of body painting is also addressed in the works of artist Kumé Assurini and the Collective Kujyete Marytykwa'awa and Constelar Ancestral Network. Assurini revisits the genipapo-and-charcoal body

painting tradition of the Awaete using acrylic on canvas. She recreates and re-interprets the traditional motifs seen on women from her community by using the outlines of her young son to create her painting titled *O Corpo da Verdadeira Alma (The Body of the True Soul)*.



Larissa Ye'p a (Tukano), *Corpo Espiritual (The spiritual body)*, 2023, Acrylic ink on paper, Collection of the Artist

Mother-child relationships, the ceramic body related to women's bodies, labor, and the care that female body cycles entails are also explored by the ceramist and visual artist Larissa Ye'pa, who picks up her grandmother's ceramic art practice and converts her wisdom into paintings.



AMITIKATXI Tiriyo, Katxuyana and Txikiyana women organized at the Wëriton Iyeripo Arts and Crafts Fund (Tiriyo, Katxuyana and Txikiyana), *The Forest is our Future, Which Makes us Grow*, 2021, Beads, red fabric, Collection of the Artists

We are pleased to showcase a representation of the tree known as the forest mother (Sumaúma), which was woven into fabric and adorned with bead art by Tiriyo, Katxuyana, and Txikiyana women out of Tumucumaque National Park, the largest national park in Brazil and the largest protected tropical forest in the world. This is the first contemporary art piece ever created by these women and Cecília de Santarém (Iepé), propelling their voices and wisdom from the depths of the Amazon Forest to the other side of the world.

Also featured in this exhibit are Guarani Mbya, Guarani Nhandeva, and Maxacali

artists and thinkers who live in the Nhe'ery (translated from Guarani: Where Spirits Bathe), post-colonially known as the Atlantic Forest, as it spans the Brazilian coast all the way up to central South America.

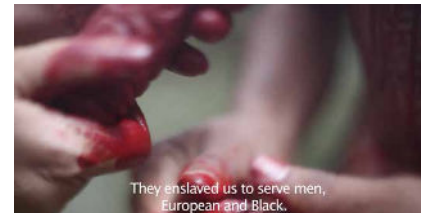
Despite having lost roughly 92% of its original cover in Brazil, the Atlantic Forest remains home to the greatest diversity of flowers in the world (angiosperms), surpassing even the biodiversity of the world's biggest tropical forest, the Amazon.



Cristine Takuá (Maxacali), Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Carlos Papa (Guarani Mbya), Anita Ekman & Shezad Dawood, *Hybrid Futures. Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea*. Episode 8, 2022Film, 17:33 min

The art created by women and their communities in the Nhe'ery (Atlantic Forest), isn't commodity art. It is thought

art, dream art, and action art from living schools that are engaging in collaborative work to relay Earth-healing knowledge since only 8% of the original forest remains in place in Brazil. The film *Leviathan* addresses this issue and was created by the curators Cris Takua, Sandra Benites, and Anita Ekman with Carlos Papa and Shezad Dawood.



Anita Ekman, with Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Sandra Nanayna (Tariano), and Marcelo Noronha, *Tupi Valongo – Kunhanguereko (The bodies of women)*, 2021 Film, 7:43 min, Performance and video made in 2021 for live discussion at MoMA, NY

The history of colonization in South America is closely tied to the history of this forest. Consequently, the amassing of wealth by Northern Hemisphere countries was also a result of their near-complete devastation of the Atlantic Forest, which led to the genocide of Indigenous peoples. The enslaving and rape of Indigenous women,

including the Guarani, who knew the ancient routes connecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (allowing the colonizers to make their way across the South American continent), is one of the topics of the video *Tupi Valongo – Kunhanguereko (The Body of Women)*, created by the curators with Sandra Nanayna and Marcelo Noronha featured in this show.

It should also be noted that it was mostly gold taken from the womb of ancient Maxacali lands in Minas Gerais that laid the groundwork for global capitalism in England. This gold, violently snatched from the Atlantic Forest, at first by the enslaved Guarani and then by Africans, was the prime mover for slave trafficking. The United States was one of the major beneficiaries, especially after securing lucrative deals at the Valongo Market in Rio de Janeiro, one of the largest slave markets, which was located in an Atlantic Forest area in the late 19th century. To that end, this exhibition stresses the need for a revision

of the colonial legacy between Brazil and the USA and the history of tropical forests, with a particular emphasis on the historical connection between 19th-century American expeditions led by Louis Agassiz, a “founding father” of the modern American scientific tradition, and Charles Hartt, who ventured into Brazilian forests and were responsible for creating a racist image (which is still in place) of Indigenous peoples living in these forests.

Charles Hartt (born Canadian, naturalized American) was a pioneer in describing and building precolonial ceramic collections by Brazilian Indigenous peoples for leading USA museums, such as the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. In 1870, Hartt turned to the Marajoara art (richly adorned precolonial ceramic work of Indigenous peoples from the coastal island of Marajó in the Brazilian Amazon) for proof of his Darwinian ideas of evolution. In texts such as *Evolution in*

Ornament, he contended that ceramic art was originally practiced by women, and that if a culture was to be deemed evolved, then men had to engage in it, too. Therefore the Indigenous cultures of Brazilian forests could be considered inferior and savage. Hartt also argued that ceramic-making was an art produced by Indigenous women who were clearly inferior to white women, because they didn't adorn their pottery with flower and fruit pictures like Western women did.

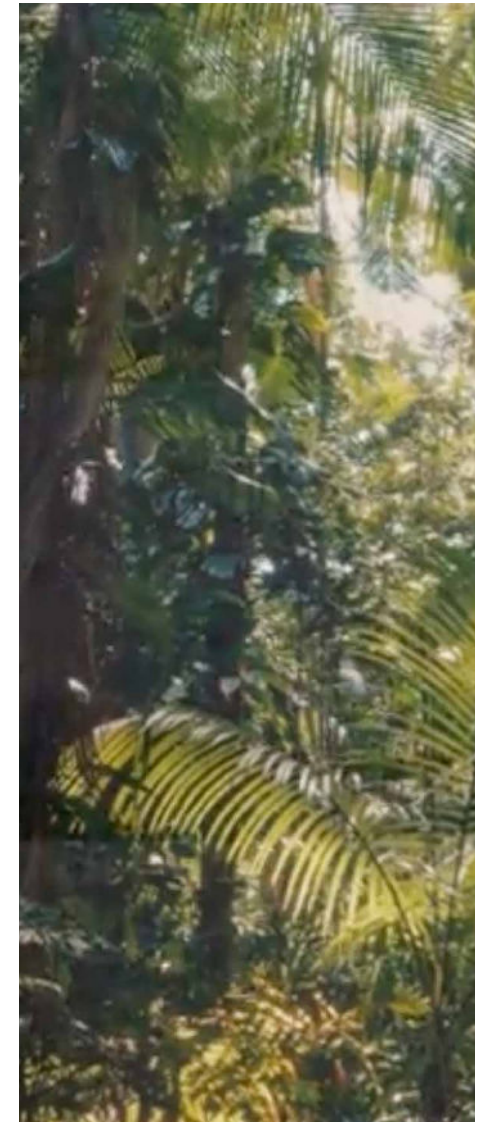
Hartt wrote: *The savage is not sensitive to the beauties of nature, and therefore cannot draw them. D'Orbigny has shown that in the indigenous art of America, one sees no representations of leaves or flowers. Only the civilized, cultured man appreciates the beauty of nature (...)*

We are still struggling to change the colonial image of forests and their peoples

established by 19th-century men, and instead strive to elevate artistic creations by Indigenous women, since to this day, their art is merely considered handicraft.

Through ancestral and contemporary representations of bodies with wombs from the Brazilian forests, this exhibition creates awareness of the creativity and struggle of Indigenous women and the pregnant Earth, and the fact that we depend on Earth like a baby depends on its mother.

Gathered here are thinking women, who associate themselves with other women, no matter what their origins are, to dream and walk together, protecting this land and its cultures, for the children and offspring yet to come.



Cristine Takuá (Maxacali), Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Carlos Papa (Guarani Mbya), Anita Ekman & Shezad Dawood, *Hybrid Futures. Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea. Episode 8*, 2022Film, 17:33 min

Endnotes:

¹ Carlos Severi and Els Lagrou in *Quimeras em diálogo. Grafismo e figuração na arte indígena*, 2013, p. 15

² Brazil is home to the biggest diversity of plants in the world at 46,097 species, nearly half of which, 43%, are exclusive (endemic) to the national territory.

³ The notion of “body territory” is a Latin American and Caribbean epistemology created from and by native women, and it encompasses their positions within the so-called new ecofeminist views from the South. Rogerio Haesbart (translated from Portuguese)

⁴ Efforts and actions carried out by the Indigenous curators Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva) and Cristine Takua (Maxacali) and the Brazilian visual artist and curator Anita Ekman with the support of the Paradise Row gallery in 2021 (Nick Hackworth and Pippa Hornb). And Alexandra Mollof, Ecocult and the artist Aislan Pankararu for this exhibition. These artworks constitute a key strategy for safeguarding the intangible heritage of these communities. Among the collaborators for this exhibition are also MoCNA chief curator Manuela Well-Off-Man and independent

producer Mônica Bentes (Kiki Bentes).

⁵ Associated with the cry, the sound that reveals the power of the moment of expulsion as a woman gives birth.

⁶ 400–1400 EC

⁷ A striking feature of Marajoara culture is the use of “tesos,” large man-made embankments harboring archaeological sites containing numerous ceramic items.

⁸ The petroglyphs in the Amazon's Negro River area are part of the set of shamanic and ancestral knowledges of indigenous peoples in the region, among them the Tarianos and Tukanos from whom Sandra Nanayna descends.



Top and bottom: MoCNA gallery images of *Womb of the Earth: Cosmivisions of the Rainforest*



THE MARAJOARA IMAGE FACTORY

–Cristiana Barreto

Many think the Amazon Forest is a virgin and untouched territory, and the pre-Columbian civilizations that arose in South America were restricted to the Andean region. However, in the last decades, archaeology has been uncovering a very different scenario, showing that the region, far from being empty and marginal, was densely occupied for at least 12 thousand years, and that the biodiversity of the forest is the result of centuries of cumulative management by Indigenous peoples. This “Amazonian turn” has surfaced through a few sets of evidence which still need to be better connected but have in common the recognition of another mode of interaction that includes respect, care, and negotiation among all the beings that inhabit the forest, people, animals, plants, things, and spirits.

Marajoara ceramics have been a key element to connect all these points. They appear in many sites in the eastern part of the largest island of the Amazon delta, Marajo Island, or *Isla del Mar Dulce*, as first named by V. Pinzon in 1498 as he spotted the island navigating along the coast. This immense territory, covered by lower, savannah-like vegetation, is heavily marked by the ocean and fluvial ties, and as man-made earth mounds stood out in the flooded plains, they were then considered natural islands. It is important to point out that the vision of an unpopulated forest had been gradually built over centuries by the colonizing West. First due to the inability to recognize traces of civilization other than the materiality valued in the old world, such as gold, temples, and cities; and second, as a colonizing project, to justify the extraction of resources from empty and “ownerless” territories, ignoring its Indigenous inhabitants and

their long term-history and deep rooted-traditions. Many layers of “emptiness” or “lack of civilization” have been added to this narrative during the 500 years that ensued the European invasion, from the primitive “bon sauvage” to the less attractive savagery tripod - no law, no king, no faith.¹

The growth of the forest in regions first ravaged by diseases and warfare has much contributed to hiding the traces of a long and diverse indigenous history. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when the first scientific expeditions and early archaeologists began to find remains of rare complexity and beauty, many theories about their external origin were put forward. The first archaeological finds in the region to have their Amazonian origin denied was Marajoara ceramics. How could pottery made with such technological and artistic mastery have emerged in

an environment so hostile to human development? From the Phoenicians to the Vikings, from the Aztecs to the Incas, many have been thought to be the authors of the beautiful pottery, surely a people who strayed from the highlands, or even further, who languished in the Amazon Forest.

Such a mystery attracted many expeditions to the island, bringing naturalists, geologists, and archaeologists who dug Marajoara mounds by the buckets and formed ceramic collections for museums around the world. Despite all the digging, the theory of environmental determinism prevailed until the 1980s,² when it became clear that the Marajoara pottery found in the mounds evolved out of a long local sequence of ceramics styles on the island, starting as early as 2,500 years ago. Marajoara pottery appeared around 400 CE and lasted for 1000 years, until before the European invasion.³ The Marajoara people developed elaborate

techniques to manage water resources, taking advantage of tidal movements to create massive fishponds. They also built hundreds of earth mounds for both habitation and ceremonial purposes. Other Indigenous cultures continued on the Island until the arrival of Europeans.⁴

Their sophisticated ceramics were preserved in vast numbers commonly found, until today, in the numerous groups of mounds along rivers, lakes, estuaries, and ponds. They have been at the center of debates about social complexity in the Amazon,⁵ and their iconography has helped to understand how different Amazonian art and society could have been in the past from what we know today about contemporary Indigenous groups.⁶

A vast array of artifacts, including small and large pieces like plates, pots, jars, figurines, rattles, pubic covers, adornments, and funerary urns, are found among the

ceremonial ceramics on the mounds. These pieces have been produced over centuries according to extremely rigid and consistent patterns for both shape and decoration. Among the wide variations of Amazonian ceramic styles, Marajoara is by far the one that combines the greatest number of decorative techniques, using contrasting tones of red and black paint over white slipped surfaces; and modeling, incising, and excising to create designs in relief. Complex iconographic structures use geometric designs and elements of bodies, human and animal, to produce intricate, eye-catching motifs and endless variations around core themes. Animals such as double-headed snakes, scorpions, lizards, turtles, and birds are frequent and often, in turn, compose larger, human figures.

Unlike Andean or Mesoamerican ceramics, plants are rarely represented in Amazonian pre-Columbian

materials; the stress is clearly on the relation between humans and animals and confirms the importance of an “ontology of predation” as an organizing principle for social and kinship relations, as described by ethnographers of contemporary Amazonian Indigenous groups.⁷ Also, the way bodies are represented in ceramics conforms to certain principles of perspectivist and animistic societies, in that they are unstable and transformational in essence.

In perspectivist ontologies humanity is often associated with the idea that the manifest bodily form of each species is an envelope or ‘clothing’ that conceals internal human forms. However, such human body modes are visible only to the eyes of species members and trans-specific beings such as shamans. Indeed, shamans, and sometimes chiefly shamans, have the capacity to alter their

state, transform themselves into animals or spirits by changing their body forms or appearing as hybrid forms, to communicate with beings from other worlds. Many dangers can cause reversals of body forms, with humans turning into animals and vice versa.⁸

In Amazonian imagery, and Marajoara ceramics in particular, it is common that bodies are not fully represented, forcing the eye to complete the image virtually, as a way to allude to the different shapes and forms in which a body can appear. Human bodies formed by parts of animal bodies are also common, invoking the possibilities of humans and animals to (ex)change body forms.

In Marajoara ceramics, the most impressive objects are large funerary urns found in cemetery mounds, which display a wide variety of mortuary practices, including primary and secondary burials, the placement of the remains

of both individual and multiple bodies inside the same urn, cremation, semi-cremation, disarticulation, and the presence of painted human and animal bones inside and around the urns, alongside an array of smaller vessels, stone objects, and body ornaments.

One recurrent type of funerary urn, named Pacoval or Anajás, represents a seated, pregnant, female body.⁹ The round, staggering eyes create an immediate engagement with the observer, probably indicating an altered state and differing from other typical Marajoara representations of human faces, where eyes are shaped like scorpions. The body is covered with a white slip and decorated with incisions that reveal the red color of the ceramic underneath. They create a delicate body painting with spirals and circles, and give a sense of movement, drawing attention to the protruding navel and genitalia. Decorated ceramic stools are also found in Marajó, an item that

until today is used among Indigenous groups to indicate a differential status, reserved to chiefs, shamans, or warriors.

This type of urn could represent a female shaman, or an ancestral mythical character, whose presence in cemeteries would invoke the relationship between the dead and important ancestors. The burial of a ceramic human body with the dead may reveal the intention to reverse or prevent the dangers of body transformation. Also, the external and visible appearance of bodies may depict transitory conditions, such as pregnancy, or rebirth.



Unknown Marajoara artist, *Jar with relief designs*, 400–1400 CE. Slip, painted, and carved ceramic 16.75"x 11.375", Denver Art Museum Collection: Gift of the Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.15. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.



(l) Unknown Marajoara artist, *Ceramic Pubic Cover (tanga)*, 400–1400 CE. Slip and painted ceramic, 6.5"x 4.5"x 1.75". Denver Art Museum Collection: Gift of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.8. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.



(r) Unknown Marajoara artist, *Ceramic pubic cover (tanga)*, 400–1400 CE. Slip and painted ceramic, 6.5"x 4.5"x 1.75". Denver Art Museum Collection: Gift of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.9. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

Many other types of recipients have been discovered in Marajoara ceremonial contexts, including large jars and serving vessels, but it is difficult to establish what their contents could have been. Usually, they are completely covered by convoluted designs, in a geometric composition scheme, where figures are unfolded, or mirrored, into two or four fields around the vessel. They guide the viewer's eyes through meandering and spiraling labyrinths, where sometimes one can recognize a snake, a face, or limbs with

digits but struggles to find a complete figure. A visual interplay between figure and background increases the visual confusion and is often obtained by carving through a painted surface (usually red) to reveal the underlying light color of the clay. The result makes it difficult to discern if figures are formed in the low or high-relief surface. The jar shown in Figure 2 is a good example of such techniques.

Some body adornments were also made in clay, such as ear spools, labrets, pendants and, pubic covers. In the Amazon, decorating the body is not just a matter of embellishment

but is part of practices for differentiating diverse peoples who inhabit the same world.¹⁰ Since birth, the body is slowly and continuously fabricated in a constant flow involving nutrition, abstention, the application of medicines, body painting, and adornments. These are added to the body as a physiological process, not as opposed to them; culture is part of nature.¹¹

Ceramic pubic covers are a Marajoara exclusive item; they were probably worn by women in rituals engaged with this sort of fabrication of the body, perhaps in puberty rituals. These ceramic triangles have holes at the tips to attach them to the body with a thin cord. Each *tanga* has a unique size, design, and decoration.

Tangas' decoration displays a combination of geometric motifs applied in fine red or black lines over a white slip. Many of them display two bands at the top, with a variation of a few geometric patterns that are repeated

across specimens, which could be identity markers indicating a particular social group or kinship lineage. Below the bands is a unique triangular image composed of geometric elements forming stylized faces or different planes. They draw attention to the center of the composition, as an entrance or an opening into the triangular surface or the pubis. This image can also be composed of two side panels, which can appear either in an "open" mode, showing a central figure (a cross or a face, for instance), or in a "closed" mode, with just a central dividing line.

Marajoara imagery with its interplays between figure and background, representations of incomplete, ambiguous, and hybrid bodies, and perceptive modes of hiding and showing elements, invites the viewer to see other images beyond the visible and the material. It conforms perfectly to what anthropologists

of Amazonian art have observed in contemporary Indigenous art and described as "abstract chimeras" (a thing that is seen but in fact is illusory). They intensify an image due to the mobilization of its invisible aspects.¹² This involves generating images with multiple references, recursively nested, and oscillating between figure and ground.¹³ These chimeric formal principles work as memory devices that describe relations among the mythical, spiritual, or invisible world. Depicting the invisible, Indigenous artists bring knowledge about the primordial times to the present and create a path for maintaining traditional rituals that involve changes of perspective. Marajoara ceramics are proof of how this persistent knowledge is deeply rooted in the past.



Cristine Takuá (Maxacali), Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Carlos Papa (Guarani Mbya), Anita Ekman & Shezad Dawood, *Hybrid Futures*. *Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea*. Episode 8, 2022Film, 17:33 min

Endnotes:

¹ Pero de Magalhães Gândavo in *Tratado da terra do Brasil* <https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/bitstream/handle/id/188899/Tratado%20da%20terra%20do%20Brasil.pdf> dating from 1573.

² Betty Meggers, "Environment and culture in the Amazon basin. An appraisal of the theory of environmental limitations." *Studies of Human Ecology, Social Science Monograph*, 3 (1957): 71-89.

³ Anna Curtenius Roosevelt, "Moundbuilders of the Amazon: geophysical archaeology on Marajo Island, Brazil, *Academic Press*, (1991): 447-481.

⁴ Roosevelt, 1991; Denise Schaan, "Marajoara Iconography: A Structural Approach," (2012). <https://equiponaya.com.ar/articulos/marajoi.htm>.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Shaan, 2012; Cristiana Barreto, "Beyond pots and pans: ceramic record and context in pre-colonial Amazonia," In *78th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Honolulu, HI*, (2013).

Cristiana Barreto, "Figurine traditions from the Amazon," *The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Figurines* (2017): 1-26.

⁷ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, Vol. 1. Manchester: HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory (2012), 138-143.

Carlo Fausto, *Art Effects: Image, Agency, and Ritual in Amazonia*, (U of Nebraska Press, 2020), 31ff.

⁸ Viveiros de Castro, 2012, 127.

⁹ *Female Figure Funerary Urn*, 400–1400 CE. Slip, painted and incised ceramic, 27.75" x 15". Denver Art Museum Collection: Gift of the Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.20. This urn was not on view in MoCNA's Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest exhibition to follow the January 12, 2024 regulations that went into effect in the U.S., which "require museums and federal agencies to consult and obtain informed consent from descendants, tribes or Native Hawaiian Organizations before displaying or researching human remains or cultural items, according to the Department of the Interior."

¹⁰ B A Conklin, "Reflections on Amazonian anthropologies of the body," *Medical anthropology quarterly* vol. 10,3 (1996): 373-5; Apredida Vilaça, "Chronically unstable bodies: reflections on

Amazonian corporalities," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 3 (2005): 445-464.

¹¹ Philippe Descola, *The ecology of others*, edited by Geneviève Godbout & Benjamin P. Luley (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2013.)

Philippe Descola, "Beyond nature and culture," in *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (Routledge, 2014), 77-91.

¹² Carlo Severi and Els Lagrou, eds., *Quimeras em diálogo: grafismo e figuração na arte indígena*. Editora 7Letras (Viveiros de Castro Editora LTDA-ME), 2018.

Els Lagrou, "Learning to See in Western Amazonia: How Does Form Reveal Relation?," *Social Analysis* 63, no. 2 (2019): 24-44.



MoCNA gallery image of Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest



MoCNA gallery image of *Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest*

INHABITING THE WOMB OF THE EARTH

–Claudia Mattos Avolese

“Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest” finds inspiration in the central role of women in the origin stories, as well as in the past and present of Indigenous societies in Brazil. The exhibition opens with a group of Marajoara ceramics, Wauja vessels and animal figures, and three photographs by artist and co-curator Anita Ekman. Marajoara *tangas* and vessels in the shape of pregnant women, made of clay collected from the ground centuries ago, evoke the deep links between the female body and the Earth in their capacity to generate life. In two photographs, Anita updates these ancestral relations by reproducing the patterns found on the Marajoara objects onto her pregnant body, using stamps soaked in ochre pigment. In

the third photograph, we see the Tariano actress Sandra Nanayna with similar body adornment mimicking the gesture of a woman drawn behind her on a stone wall over twelve thousand years ago. The small Wauja vessel titled *Atujuwamana* echoes these forms, pointing to the long duration and dissemination of the ties between woman and Earth within the American territory.



Unknown (Wauja/Waurá), *Atujuwamana*, 2018
Clay ceramic with charcoal painting and natural varnish, Private Collection

To the Guarani, “The Earth is a living body, she is Nhandecy eté, our mother,” as we hear Sandra Benites declare at the very beginning of the video *Tupi Valongo* – *Kunhangueroko* (*The bodies of women*). This video, along with a second one, *Leviathan*, conceptually

frames the whole exhibition. For the Guarani, the essential connection between the body of our planet and the body of women determines much of their attitude towards the environment. Being one with Earth, women feel what she feels and suffer when she suffers. There is a deep relationship between the life-generating bodies of the Earth and the women.

The arrival of European settlers to the Americas, and all the violence and rape perpetrated by them against both the land and her daughters, created disruption and confusion. In the process, the understanding of how to live in harmony with all forms of life, how to practice what the Guarani call the *Teko porã*, was lost, and it will take a collective effort to return to this way of life. Because of their deep connections with Earth, women play a central role in this recovery journey. As Benites explains, “When the Earth receives this violence

that we are faced with today, many women get confused and we need to be united among us women so we can take one another’s hands and lift one another, so we have a voice. (...) We keep saying that when women unite, they have so much strength that the Earth shakes.”¹ Art is a powerful tool in the path towards *Teko porã* because most Indigenous cultures in Brazil create it for building and preserving good relations between humans, other-than-humans, and spirits, and not for contemplation as in the West.²

Collectivity is another important keyword for understanding “Womb of the Earth”. The exhibition highlights the work of Indigenous women collectives to give them visibility and voice. Although a fair number of Indigenous artists have recently entered the art market in Brazil, more often than not they are men, who, to be successful learn to operate with a concept of

art that overvalues individual creativity. To provide women collectives with a platform is, therefore, a powerful way to support a different kind of art, rooted in community, which acts towards preserving life and healing. The imponent Sumaúma tree created by the AMITIKATXI collective of women from the Tumucumaque Indigenous Land in the state of Pará is an impressive example of the significance of collective art. The creation of this piece, composed of traditional beadwork sewn onto a bright red textile used for female festivity dresses, was documented in a video also displayed in the show. Here some of the artist-participants narrate how the project helped them unite in the fight for their territory: “To reinforce our ways of life we are here doing our work”, declares Guadalupe Tyrió, “This is an image that affirms our land.”³

Another collective represented in “Womb of the Earth” is *Kujy Ete Marytkwa’owa*, composed of Awaeté (Asurini of the

Xingu) women. In Asurini society, women are the only ones producing ceramic and textiles used both in everyday life and in shamanic rituals. They cover these objects with intricate patterns, which are also applied onto the body, as seen in the drawings by Kumé Asurini. The patterns reflect and renew Asurini’s relations with the natural and supernatural world. By working together to keep these traditions alive, the Asurini women’s collective plays a key role in preserving culture and land, as well as producing income to support their community. “Womb of the Earth” also features works by Marineide and Eliana Maxacali, who are part of the project “Escola Viva” (Live School), founded by Cristine Takuá (Maxacali) and Carlos Papa (Guarani) to educate in the spirit of *Teko porã*.



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá), *Arakuni III*, 2023, clay, charcoal paint, natural varnish, 15.75”x 3”x 2”. Image courtesy of MoCNA.

The practice of ceramics among the Wauja also works to bind their community and preserve tradition. Women and men produce ceramics, but women have a significant role in its manufacture today. According to Wauja ontology, not only humans inhabit the Earth but also the *Yerupoho*. When dressed, they appear as animals and plants, but they can also become visible in their monstrous form as *Apappataai*. Kamalu Hai, the serpent-canoe, is the *Yerupoho* who taught humans the art of ceramics. According to the story, Kamalu Hai came down the Batovi river carrying singing pans on its back. On the journey, it defecated along the river’s margins producing clay. The vessels created today by the Wauja follow the patterns of Kamalu Hai’s pans. They play a central role in Wauja life and in their relation to the *Apappataai*, entities that can bring both illness and healing.⁴ Ceramic production is today the most important source of

income for the Wauja. The pans and plates manufactured in traditional style are valued and traded across the different communities of the Xingu, as well as with non-Indigenous people. “Womb of the Earth” brings a significant group of zoomorphic Wauja ceramics that embody their singular way of relating to the world. The agency of art in the process of sustaining harmonic relations within the web of life is beautifully expressed by “The Master”, an artwork created by Judite Carlos da Silva Freitas and the Apaminktj Kaxinawá collective. Weaving is an exclusive female activity among the Huni Kuin (Cashinauha) people of Western Amazonia. Sidika, the mythical Boa snake transformed into an old lady, taught the twenty-five different patterns present on its skin to a young woman. They are the language of *Yuxibo*, powerful spiritual beings that co-inhabit the world and the designs are paths that lead to them. The same design is used in

body painting during rituals to attract the *Yukibo* and profit from their influence. In “The Master” we see a variety of these patterns accompanied by snakes hanging on nylon threads as a reminder of their origin.

A woman also plays a central role in Tukano cosmology, in which Grandmother of the Universe is the Earth itself and was the one to blow humanity into life after Grandfather of the Universe failed to do so. In the Tukano story of origin reproduction organs were once the objects used to produce humans, among them a stool and a cigar holder, which later were incorporated into their bodies. Larissa Tucano represents these ritual instruments in one of her paintings, together with two fish, as a reference to the ancestral affiliations of her people with this animal. She also paints a *Kahpitü* vessel used to store the hallucinogenic drink *kahpi* with which communication with the

spirits is achieved. Besides working on canvas, Larissa also creates ceramics. They are innovative in their form while following the traditional Tukano technique of smoking the pieces to obtain a wonderful shiny black surface.

“Womb of the Earth” embraces a female perspective beating strong from within the rainforests of South America to teach us again how to step lightly and speak “in synchrony with the tempo of our footsteps.”⁶

Endnotes:

¹ Sandra Benites, in: Anita Ekman, Sandra Benites, Sandra Nanayna and Marcelo Noronha, *Tupi Valongo – Kunhanguereko (The bodies of women)*, video, 2021.

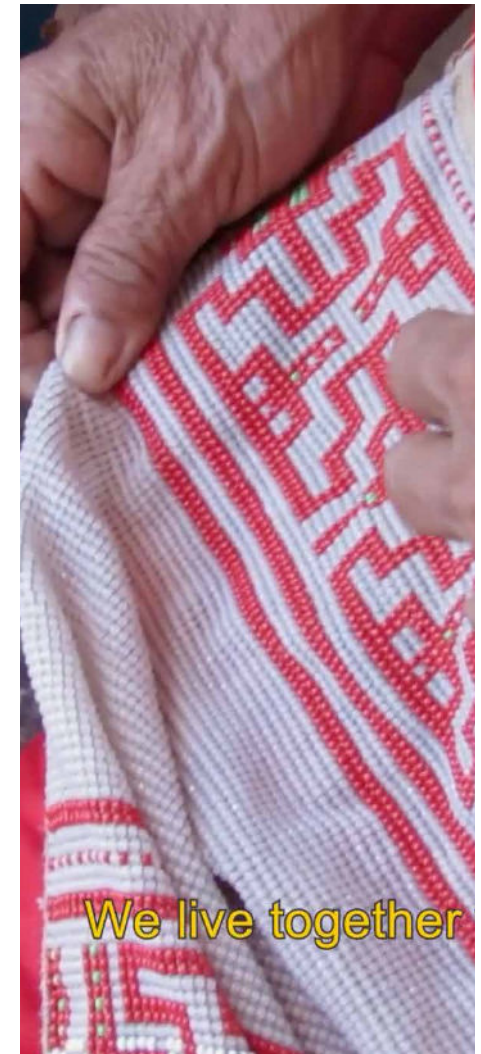
² Speaking about the relations of the Cachinahua (Huni Kuin) to art, Els Lagrou states, for example, that “Design among the Cashinahua is about ‘relatedness’. It hints at relations linking different worlds as well as pointing to the interdependence of different kinds of people.” (p. 198)

³ Guadalupe Tyrió in: *Itu nai anya arimikane*, video, 2021.

⁴ For more on Wauja’s relation to ceramics see Aristoteles Barcellos, “Tobacco visions: shamanic drawings of the Wauja Indians”, in: *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi*, Belém, v. 13, n. 3, p. 501-517, set. - dez. 2018.

⁵ Juliana Lins, *Cerâmica Tukano*, São Paulo, Instituto Sécio Ambiental (ISA) and FOIRN, 2020

⁶ Cristine Takuá in: *Cris, Sandra, Papa & Yasmine, Hybrid Futures. Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea*, video, 2022.



AMITIKATXI Tirió, Katxuyana, and Txikiyana women organized at the Wëriton Iyeripo Arts and Crafts Fund) and Cecília de Santarém (Tirió, Katxuyana and Txikiyana) *Itu Nai Anya Arimikane (About the Process)*, 2022
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Womb of the Earth: Cosmovision of the Rainforest



The Earth welcomes us, feeds us, protects us, and gives us a very condition to live in harmony with all the beings that share its sacred ground with us. The hot and humid tropical forests are like the womb of Earth, as they harbor the most diversity of habitats on the planet. Brazil is home to the greatest biodiversity of life in the world.

Building on this metaphor, this exhibition's aim with the artworks together the cosmologies of different indigenous peoples regarding the origin of life. *Womb of the Earth* investigates the role of indigenous women in art and their spaces in the Amazon and Karao Forest. Artworks illustrate the cosmological relationship between women's bodies and time, and address the vital link to their identity-body-land relationship.

The womb is the space that we come, the transformation of bodies. Many creative beings dwell in the forest, another guardian as if she are watching us. Thus, the artworks created by the indigenous women artists not only evoke the voices and teachings of the forest mother, but also the presence of their grandmothers, the trees, birds, snakes, and enchanted beings that have taught indigenous peoples the art of coexisting in equilibrium, respecting the diversity in this dense web of life that pulsates deep in the womb of the Earth.

The artworks featured here strive to introduce collectives of indigenous women artists from the South American tropical forest to the contemporary art field.

MoCNA gallery image of *Womb of the Earth: Cosmovisions of the Rainforest*



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá)
Arakuni, 2023
 Red clay ceramic with charcoal
 paint and natural varnish
 Edition 3/5
 Collection of the Artist



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá)
Arakuni, 2023
 Red clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Edition 3/5
 Collection of the Artist



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá)
Arakuni III, 2023
 Clay ceramic with charcoal paint
 and natural varnish
 Edition 1/1
 Collection of the Artist



Makalo Waurá (Wauja/Waurá)
Yupemana, 2023
 Clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Edition 1/1
 Collection of the Artist



Kapulupeno Waurá (Wauja/Waurá)
Yupetaim, 2023
 Clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Edition 1/1
 Collection of the Artist



Unknown (Wauja/Waurá)
 Untitled, no date
 Clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Private Collection



Unknown (Wauja/Waurá)
Yerupohokana, no date
 Clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Private Collection



Unknown (Wauja/Waurá)
Atujuwamana, 2018
 Clay ceramic with charcoal
 painting and natural varnish
 Private Collection



Unknown (Marajoara/Marajó)
Incised Jar, 400–1400 CE
 Slip-painted and carved ceramic
 Denver Art Museum Collection:
 Gift of the Collection of
 Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2006.15



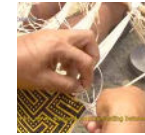
Unknown (Marajoara/Marajó)
Pubic Cover (tanga), 400–1400 CE
 Painted ceramic
 Denver Art Museum Collection:
 Gift of Frederick and
 Jan Mayer 2006.9



Unknown (Marajoara/Marajó)
Pubic Cover (tangas),
 400–1400 CE
 Painted ceramic
 Denver Art Museum Collection:
 Gift of Frederick and
 Jan Mayer 2006.8



AMITIKATXI Tiriyo, Katxuyana and Txikiyana
 women organized at the Wëriton Iyeripo
 Arts and Crafts Fund (Tiriyo, Katxuyana and
 Txikiyana) *The Forest is our Future, Which
 Makes us Grow*, 2021, Beads, fabric, dye
 Collection of the Artist



AMITIKATXI Tiriyo, Katxuyana, and
 Txikiyana women organized at the
 Wëriton Iyeripo Arts and Crafts Fund
 and Cecilia de Santarém (Tiriyo,
 Katxuyana and Txikiyana) *Itu Nai Anya
 Arimikane* (About the Process) 2022
 Film: 7:45 min.



Ibatsai Judite Carlos Da Silva Freitas/
 Collective Apaminktaj (Kaxinawá Huni
 Kuin) *Tecida Mestra Professora* (The
 Female Fabric Master Teacher), 2020,
 Cotton fabric: Judite Carlos da Silva
 Freitas Beaded snakes: Apaminktaj
 collective (Bismani, Itã, Shane kene)
 Collection of the Artist



Kume Assurini (Awaete/Assurini)
Kujy rarywa ete-juakete I (*Soul of
 the real man*), 2021
 Fabric paint (acrylic) on canvas
 Collection of the Artist



Kume Assurini (Awaete/Assurini)
*Juakete – Pintura Verdadeira
 Plana*, (*True Flat Painting*), 2021
 Fabric paint (acrylic) on canvas
 Collection of the Artist



Kume Assurini (Awaete/Assurini)
*Taggawaete – Corpo da alma de
 verdade* (*Body of the true soul*)
 2021
 Fabric paint (acrylic) on canvas
 Collection of the Artist



Anita Ekman, Sandra Nanayna (Tariano),
Ocre – Pele e Pedra (*Ochre – Skin and
 Rock*), Ritual Performance, São Raimundo
 Nonato, Piauí, Brazil, 2019, Photograph by
 Edu Simões, Digital photograph
 on photo rag paper
 Collection of the Artist



Anita Ekman, with Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Sandra Nanayna (Tariano), and Marcelo Noronha *Tupi Valongo – Kunhanguereko (The bodies of women)*, 2021
Film, 7:43 min



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Untitled, 2023
Wood, yarn, acrylic, canvas
Collection of the Artist



Marineide Maxakali (Maxakali)
Woodpecker Mãnãmãn, 2023
Watercolor and felt-tip pen on paper
Collection of the Artist



Cristine Takuá (Maxacali), Sandra Benites (Guarani Nhandeva), Carlos Papa (Guarani Mbya), Anita Ekman & Shezad Dawood
Hybrid Futures. Leviathan: From the Forest to the Sea. Episode 8, 2022
Film, 17:33 min



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Cosmologia da mulher Ye'pa Mahsõ, 2023
Acrylic ink on paper
Collection of the Artist



Eliana Maxakali (Maxakali)
xunim yõg hãm terra do Morcego (Land of the Bat), 2023
Watercolor and felt-tip pen on paper
Collection of the Artist



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Kahpitü, 2023
Acrylic ink on paper
Collection of the Artist



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Corpo Espiritual (The spiritual body), 2023
Acrylic ink on paper
Collection of the Artist



Puí Dessana (Dessana)
Kipitü - Saucepan with lid (traditional way), 2023
Clay with caraipé (ashes from a specific tree from the Amazon)
Collection of the Artist



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Untitled, no date
Fibers, dye, acrylic canvas
Collection of the Artist



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Kahpitü, 2023
Acrylic ink on paper
Collection of the Artist



Puí Dessana (Dessana)
Uhuri-Jabuti (Amazon Turtle) pen holder, 2023
Clay with caraipé (ashes from the Amazon specific tree)
Collection of the Artist



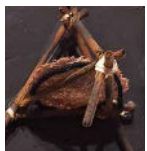
Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Untitled, no date
Basketry, acrylic, canvas
Collection of the Artist



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Resguardo (seclusion), 2023
Acrylic ink on paper
Collection of the Artist



Unknown (Wauja/Waurá)
Untitled, no date
Clay ceramic with charcoal painting and natural varnish
Private Collection



Larissa Ye'pa (Tukano)
Untitled, 2023
Wood, yarn, acrylic, canvas
Collection of the Artist



Unknown Artist
Gourd pot with Urucum seeds