

## **Luiz Camillo Osorio in conversation with Denilson Baniwa**

**Denilson, tell us a little about your decision to become an artist? In the indigenous community where you were born and grew up, how did you reconcile your everyday life with your artistic process and aesthetic experience?**

In the community there's no distinction between what is art and what is life; the everyday is linked between making a painting with natural pigments on the walls of the ceremonial house (such as frescoes) and creating a plantation; both involve knowledge that's been passed down through the generations. This kind of knowledge is not necessarily stagnant, because both the process of painting a wall and creating a plantation can be updated or recreated by each person or each generation. Indigenous peoples have always shared this knowledge, whether with scientists or people who visit the villages, but in general all this is restricted to the small group that is academia or "friends of Indians". The decision to become an artist comes from a need to share knowledge with an audience that sometimes doesn't even know that there are still indigenous people in Brazil; it is to reach these people through the path of affectivity or emotion which is not associated with the predispositions of indigenists.

**You work with painting and performance. How were these languages constructed?**

The need to show something that I'm unable to do through painting, for example, made me transform the jaguar into something physical that people could interact with in other ways. I understand that performance is a way of directly provoking and also receiving answers, in the same act. Like everything with me, the performance was born out of a need to communicate. What I did was to combine indigenous knowledge with languages, which I think is visually artistic.

**Many of your works refer to the use of technology by indigenous communities. How do you regard this process? To what extent is this contact transformative? How do you regard the penetration of Western ways of life into the lives of indigenous communities?**

Since the years before the Constitution of 1988, the indigenous peoples recognized the importance of appropriating the means of communication with debates forming a part of their discussions and these means were already used in support of the Indigenous Social Movement. Today, this need remains and has become increasingly important, because through these technologies and knowledge it's possible to achieve territorial recognition and monitoring, the dissemination of indigenous issues inside and outside

of the country, to create networks of peoples where they can combine ideas and strategies, among other possibilities enabled by the new technologies.

However, there are still many people who believe it that we have no right to modernity or technology. This belief derives from ignorance of what cultural identity is. The technological progress of mankind has contributed to various sectors of society and is an instrument that serves human beings; whereas cultural identity is related to the history of a people, its signs, possessions, worldviews, cosmology and the sacred. So, the use of “modernities” or new tools doesn’t mean the abandonment or loss of indigenous culture. It may even help to strengthen identity and overcome changes that occur naturally or forcefully through external violence.

**How do you regard the relationship between your belonging to an Amerindian cultural tradition and contemporary art – which is so globalized and has codes that tend to be highly standardized.**

It is undeniable that Amerindian cultures have always been part of the construction of what we now understand as contemporary art, from knowledge of pigments, forms, pottery techniques, for example, to the use of substances that connect us with other worlds. I think the real question is how contemporary art sees (if it acknowledges) its relationship with the Amerindian tradition, because just as Picasso sought references in the indigenous peoples of Asia and Africa even today contemporary (Brazilian) artists would not exist if it were not for the appropriation of Amerindian cultures and traditions without any respect whatsoever. As an indigenous being, I have simply come to occupy a place that I don’t see many indigenous people occupying, including seeking to master this knowledge and non-indigenous languages, trying to preserve my indigenous essence; and we are occupying a symbolic and hegemonic territory that has historically constructed an imaginary of national identity in an exclusive and discriminatory manner. This occupation is precisely due to the failure to recognize that indigenous people can be producers of art and knowledge beyond what has been preestablished by the imaginary of academia and society. Native peoples have always been represented, exhibited and studied through their silencing. As such, the art produced by indigenous people, whatever it is (plastic art, cinema, theater, photography, etc.), will never be devoid of its political meaning and intent, even if unconsciously.

**Do you dialogue with other indigenous artists about your work and theirs?  
Was your coming to Rio (Niterói) important for your work?**

Yes, every day. They are artists I respect and always try to meet with them, so that we can occupy places that we were shut out of, and, if necessary, we will make a ladder to jump through the window. They are artists from various regions of the world who are

producing a lot of work with ever increasing quality, and I do not want to be left out of this great movement which is getting stronger. My coming to Niterói was a romantic accident; it was and still is very important to have come, because in the southeast I had access to tools and knowledge that would have been difficult to achieve in the region where I was born, in addition to being able to gain access to artists who were using indigenous culture as a ladder and to be able to confront them in their own territories. But my coming was not exactly to try my luck in the city (as they identify those who are in exodus), my coming was to try my luck in love and to escape war.

**What has this nomination for the PIPA award been like? How do you regard this category of online award and what role do you think this award will play in your career?**

It was a surprise and a joy, because I've exchanged a lot of ideas with other indigenes who have passed through PIPA. Jaider Esbell has been a great and inspiring ally; Arissana Pataxó has also been a great friend; we talk about work and poetics, and Makhu, who through Ibã Sales, has also taught me a lot about access to other worlds. Being part of PIPA like they were is a joy I cannot express, just as I hope more indigenous artists will be soon. I don't have a view on the online category, but I can say that this category made me realize how many people are following me and supporting me; this is priceless; to see my community supporting me, to see other indigenous peoples and communities supporting me, gave me a lot of strength, besides, of course, friends and many strangers who voted; it was something I didn't expect and gave me the inspiration that I was running out of. PIPA has already shown that many things are going to change in my career; the number of invitations to exhibitions is indicative of the visibility and importance of PIPA.