

Personal cartographies of a Huitoto mythology: Rember Yahuarcani and the enlarging of the Peruvian contemporary art scene¹

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So then I decided to be more prepared, and I began to accept myself as an artist, not as a Huitoto artist, not as an Indigenous artist, but as a Peruvian artist, which I can be in any place of the world. And, I thought that I had something to show, and that you had something to learn, if you wanted to.

Rember Yahuarcani, *interview*, Dec. 2008

Rember Yahuarcani López was born in Pebas, in the Peruvian Amazonian department of Loreto, in 1985. He belongs to the *Aymenu* clan of the Huitoto group. In 2003 he came to Lima for the first time. His father, the painter and sculptor Santiago Yahuarcani, was invited to impart workshops as part of the exhibition *Serpiente de Agua*. Instead, he decided to send his son. This opportunity would change Rember Yahuarcani's perspective on his life and artwork. This article explores Rember Yahuarcani's art practice and the creation of his own pictorial vocabulary based on his traditions, his artistic explorations, and his new experiences. The article also analyzes Yahuarcani's discourse and performance in making himself a contemporary artist, and his receptivity in the Limeño art scene. Yahuarcani's trajectory will be examined in relation to new art agents' strategies, networks, and narratives that aim to provide a more

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established visibility to Amazonian contemporary art in Lima's art circuits. A new art agenda in which Yahuarcani participates and thus shapes.

Agents and Platforms: Enlarging the Peruvian Contemporary Art Scene

Barranco - Lima, August 2008. I wake up and turn on the radio. Bareto, a currently famous band that uses Amazonian rhythms is playing. I have to do some tasks at city hall. I walk there. I pass by Neomutatis, a hipster clothes shop, and a fashionable dress with Andean and Amazonian designs is hanging in its display window. I keep walking, and suddenly I stop. Red letters announces an exhibition of Rember Yahuarcani in the art gallery 80m² Arte & Debate. In the main square a group of Shipibo women are selling their seed necklaces. I finally enter the city hall. Months after this episode, a journalist asks the artist and curator Christian Bendayan, "Is it really true that the Amazon is in vogue, at least in a cultural way?"² Before dealing with the new location of the Amazon in the cultural landscape and Bendayan's curatorial practice towards Amazonian art, I want to address that the Amazon's visibility is part of a process, not a fashion in vogue, that implies struggles, strategies, and agents that have inserted the long lasting "invisible Amazon" on the national Peruvian stage.

Until the 1980s, the image of Peru as a nation was composed essentially of two central regions: the Coast and the Andes. While the Coast linked notions of progress and modernity, the Andes spoke to ideas about national roots and traditions. The Amazon was not included in either of these national imaginaries. Instead it was physically, politically, and symbolically isolated from the rest of the country. It appeared sporadically, but in relation to exploitation or conquest. Examples include rubber exploitation from the 1870s to the 1890s that led to slavery and village displacement, or the president Belaunde's policies that in the 1960s promoted the construction of roads in an attempt to redirect Andean migration from the coast to the Amazon, policies that consequently caused the appropriation of native territories. It was only in 1974 that Juan Velasco's government recognized the native territories, but this recognition was modeled on Andean communities that had little to do with territorial control of the Amazon. This misconception was reformulated by anthropologists (Barclay 1985: 20) and by the denunciations made by indigenous movements.

² In: <http://diariodeigt.wordpress.com/2009/03/27/christian-bendayan-verde-al-poder>

In the 1970s, local Amazonian leaders started to raise their voices against inequalities and isolation. Unlike Andeans, who had raised their voices on the basis of class divisions (Calderón 2000), Amazonians grounded their movement on issues of ethnicity. If the 1970s was the decade of the indigenous movement formation; the 1980s was the decade of their national consolidation and international networks, and 1990s and mainly the 2000s (after Fujimori's dictatorship) are decades marked by indigenous movement national visualization and their intense political participation. In this arena, native leaders acting as political actors have put their cultural symbols in motion, as "index of authenticity." (Conklin 1997: 712) Never before had Amazonian symbols and culture been empowered as assets or put on display. However, despite steps forward regarding the social and political recognition of Amazon people as equal citizens as well as cultural diverse, discrimination persists in Peruvian society and within governmental policies. The thirty-four deaths in Bagua on June 6th 2009 is only one example.³ In a collective e-mail Rember Yahuarcani writes, "Like the birth of the Republic of Peru, the history of a forgotten, ignored, oppressed... hated people is written." (June 7th 2009) Now, however, this history is written by other authors, thus providing new perspectives. Indigenous movements, anthropologists, tourism, new consumers, and curators, among others have played an important role in including the Amazon in the national imagination and in recognizing its people as political actors. In this article, I deal with the art and cultural sphere.

Until a decade ago, the Amazon was on the periphery of Peruvian cultural representation and of the Peruvian art scene. According to the curator Gredna Landolt (2003: 47), the greatest difficulty in producing the exhibition *Serpiente de Agua* was to work with the few existing collections and to cull through the little information available about the pieces. Only in the beginning of the 2000s did the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología e Historia and the Museo Nacional de la Cultura Peruana open their Amazonian halls. Before that, both museums focused on the Andean and Coastal material culture and history. The lack of interest regarding Amazonian cultures as part of a larger sphere of Peruvian cultural representation was clearly reflected in the national motto: *Peru, País de los Incas* (Peru, the Inca's country), which in 2008 was changed to *Perú, vive la leyenda* (Peru, live the legend).

³ The Government responded brutally towards Indigenous protests against the enactment of the unconstitutional law #1090 (forest and wildlife law). This violent action has been called the Bagua's massacre.

Regarding the construction of Peruvian art history, Lauer (2007: 101) notes that “during a long time the Indian figure [the highlander figure] has been considered to be the touchstone of pictorial nationalism.”⁴ From romantic visions to the Indigenismo movement, from abstractionism with pre-Inca roots to a political recognition of Andean artists and its rejection by many mestizo art agents, and to the appropriation of urban Andean icons, the Andes and the Andean people have been a continuous reference in Peruvian art. However, despite constant representation and appropriation of the Andes by mestizo artists, the inclusion of Andean artists and their artistic proposals within the art circuit has not necessarily happened beyond the pretense of “egalitarian” discourses (Borea and Germaná 2008). I propose that the Amazon stands in another situation. The visibilization and circulation of Amazonian art in the 21st Century favors its incorporation into the Peruvian art system.⁵ Amazonian art circulates within new conceptual landscapes while at the same time actively participate in shaping these landscapes. The consolidation of a new group of agents (curators, artists, promoters) into the art system during recent years has led to the creation of new art values. They, in turn, have created more inclusive agendas regarding the poetics and politics of representation (Karp 2001). These agents are articulating Amazonian art in innovative curatorial discourses and displaying them in strategic ways and in strategic venues. I wish to address four consecutive milestone exhibitions during the 2000s that have contributed to situate the Amazon in the cultural sphere: *El Ojo Verde. Cosmovisiones Amazónicas* (2000-2001), *Serpiente de Agua. La Vida Indígena en la Amazonía* (2003), *Amazonia al Descubierto. Dueños, costumbres y visiones* (2005) and *La Piel de un Río. La Amazonía en el Arte*

⁴ Arnd Schneider in his book *Appropriation as Practice. Art and Identity in Argentina* (2006) points out that in Argentina “appropriating choices among artists have to be deliberately constructed. This is in stark contrast to countries such as Mexico, Peru or Ecuador, in which nationalist projects provided legitimate and hegemonic discourses for the assimilation or incorporation of indigenous societies into the nation-state – at least since the Mexican Revolution.” (Schneider 2006: 3) In the Peruvian case, this argument is valid for the Andes, but does not explain the Amazon case.

⁵ With this, I am not suggesting that individual artists, native or mestizo, were not previously linked with the Amazon as a source for artistic practices. For instance, the mestizo Amazonian painter Cesar Calvo de Araujo (1910-1970) went beyond the travelers’ drawings of an exotic jungle to portray habitants in real contexts (Bendayán 2008) and was an influential figure in Iquitos. The National Art Schools in Iquitos, Bagua, and Pucallpa trained local artists and introduced them to local art scenes. Nevertheless, their different proposals did not obtain a strong impact on the main Limeño art circuit. In addition, the Amazon was not part of other artists’ imaginations, and native painters were exclusively committed to the tourist art market. Some exceptions to this tendency are the artists Gino Ceccarelli, Pablo Amaringo and Victor Churay. Amaringo (1943-2009) and Churay (1972 – 2002) achieved an earlier entrance into the capital’s art spheres by depicting the Amazonian cosmology. Amaringo did this at the end of the 1980s and Churay in the 1990s. But Churay died tragically in an accident in 2002 and Amaringo did not obtain a strategically constant presence in the national art circuit. Limeño society, and specifically the art milieu, was not yet prepared to re-locate Amaringo beyond an ethnographic discourse and a sphere of mysticism.

Contemporáneo (2008). The last two exhibitions in particular have played a critical role in expanding the contemporary art circuit.⁶

El Ojo Verde, curated by the historian Pablo Macera and the curator Gredna Landolt, supported by Fundación Telefónica and promoted by AIDSESEP,⁷ revealed the ways in which Amazonian groups give significance to the material and intangible world. Looking for adequate ways to display the Amazonian cosmology and to include native people in the process of representing their culture, the curators convoked native specialists, who were selected by their corresponding federations, to depict their myths and beliefs. The overwhelming response to the show created a space for the exhibition *Serpiente de Agua* three years later. In *Serpiente de Agua*, the curatorial proposal and the display strategies were similar to *El Ojo Verde*, but its scope, political support and venue placed the Amazon at the height of visualization. This exhibition was curated by Gredna Landolt and Alexandre Surralles, supported by Telefónica and other organizations. It was promoted specifically by the first lady Eliane Karp in concordance with AIDSESEP. With this exhibition, a 19th Century train station in Lima's center, *Desamparados*, was converted to a cultural place of encounter by hosting the show. It is within this exhibition context that the artist Rember Yahuarcani first travelled to Lima. It was also there that he met art agents that eventually facilitated the articulation of his artistic network.

In 2005, a third key exhibition *Amazonia al Descubierta* was on show at the Museo de Arte de San Marcos. Composed of seven curatorial projects, the exhibition focused specifically on Amazonian art. Among the seven projects, Pablo Macera presented *Los Dueños del Mundo* with paintings of the *Ashaninka* Enrique Casanto and the Shipibo Lastenia Canayo. Gredna Landolt presented *Esta es Nuestra Costumbre: Shoyan Sheca y Bahuan Jisbë / Elena Valera y Roldan Pinedo*, and the curator and artist Christian Bendayán presented *La Soga de los Muertos. El Conocer Desconocido del Ayahuasca*. Bendayán brought together the works of thirty contemporary artists, mestizos, and natives. These works evoke the artists' experiences with the *Ayahuasca* plant. Among these artists was Rember Yahuarcani. In 2003 *La Soga de los Muertos* was proposed to another gallery, but not accepted. However, after two years was part of this bigger event in the Museo de Arte de San Marcos. I suggest that two factors might have played in favor of this latter

⁶ In this new panorama, significant solo exhibitions of contemporary artists who integrate and use Amazonian issues as their main artistic references have been carried out, such as shows of Bendayán, Manchego, Ccecarelli, Chávez, Yahuarcani, among others. There have also been remarkable exhibitions in Shipibo traditional art such as *Una Ventana al Infinito. Arte Shipibo y Conibo*. But I emphasize next in four exhibitions that have produced more general discourses.

⁷ Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon.

acceptance. First, *El Ojo Verde y Serpiente del Agua* opened a path to blockbuster Amazonian exhibitions and to more challenging proposals, as is the nature of contemporary art. Second, the people managing the Museo de Arte de San Marcos possessed a special commitment for more inclusive art agendas. The museum director was Armando Williams, an artist and curator, who in 2008 promoted Rember Yahuarcani's first exhibition in an art gallery. The director of the Institution to which this museum belongs was Gustavo Buntinx, an art historian, art critic and curator who produces dynamic cross-cultural readings. I argue here that cultural projects are entangled in social networks that agents activate and use them strategically for circulating proposals at the time they intend to create, reinforce, or shift artistic values.

In *La Piel de un Río: La Amazonía en el Arte Contemporáneo* exhibited in the Museo de Arte de San Marcos, Bendayán reinforced his project that sought to recognize cultural diversity in contemporary art. For Bendayán *La Piel de un Río*, *La Soga de los Muertos* and *Puro Sabor* (a previous show) were three faces of the same project (interview, Dec. 2008). As an artist and curator, Christian Bendayán (Iquitos 1973) has consistently pushed the boundaries of art in Peruvian society. In general, Bendayán's artworks represent and combine marginalized urban Amazonian people, such as transvestites and prostitutes; middle-class kitsch aesthetics; religious images and sensual motives on a garish color palette. Bendayán has participated in several exhibitions that according to Germaná (2007: 134) had situated him as one of the most important and influential contemporary artists. Hence, his ability for articulating different traditions, groups and aesthetics and incorporating them in new narratives, be it on a canvas or within a museum space, is part of his artistic and curatorial proposals.

These four consecutive milestone exhibitions that put forth a polycentric perspective on what art and contemporary art are (Shohat and Stam 2002) have generated a strong impact on the conceptual and artistic landscape of Peru by enlarging the cultural and artistic arena. This art scenario that is "more encompassing of difference" (Morphy 2007: 3) is the result of new curatorial discourses and strategies, adequate venues of display, key sponsors, political support, renewed feelings of nationhood, and a growing arena of intercultural art production. It is in this arena where Rember Yahuarcani stands, acts, and contributes to produce. In art journalist Diego Otero's 2009 annual review, he writes: "An Amazonian year. Paradoxically, in a political context of threat and non-respect, 2009 has been a very significant year for the

Amazonian culture. The two parallel exhibitions of Rember Yahuarcani, at the end of the year, confirm this.” (El Dominical, El Comercio, Jan. 10th 2010)

Rember Yahuarcani: Articulating a New Pictorial Vocabulary

Rember Yahuarcani's work has moved through two different regimes of value: from the tourist market to the contemporary art scene. Throughout this circulation, Yahuarcani's, references, compositions, materials, colors, self-perception, and display venues have changed and been redefined. I propose to analyze Yahuarcani's work in four periods. Before doing this, I wish to point out two characteristics that are constant present in his work and that relate to Huitoto traditions. First, Yahuarcani finds in the Huitoto cosmology a site of inspiration, and mainly in those cosmologies related to the *Aymenu* clan. Originally, this clan was settled in the Putumayu River in Colombia. Due to the territorial conflict between Peru and Colombia, some families migrated to the Ampiyacu River in Loreto. In Peru, according to Yahuarcani, the *Aymenu* clan is comprised of only two extended families. Martha López, the artist's grandmother, is the matriarch of one family. She maintains several oral traditions that have been transmitted to Yahuarcani. She narrated to him the various myths that provide the main vocabulary in his artistic language. In addition, Yahuarcani acquires further information about these myths through anthropological books and articles. Yahuarcani's work is, then, first informed by his experiences and understandings of his culture, but this first-hand reference is not his only source. Second, Yahuarcani's work is full of characters with transformational bodies and identities. As Barcelos Neto explains, the conception of body in the Amazon is unstable, it has to be produced and reinforced everyday.⁸ The transit between humans, animals, plants, and even natural phenomena is not only possible but frequent. This combination of different bodies is also an articulation of diverse identities. The original entity acquires the abilities and sometimes even the body of the entity to which it is transformed. The depiction of *Convirtiéndose en Aima* (fig. 1) is a clear example of this. In general, this transformation finds support in myths and in shamanic practices. Yahuarcani takes the belief of transmutational bodies to produce many of his characters (see fig. 4). For instance, *Dueña del Pijuyo III*, fig. 4, shows a cyclical transformation between plant, human and animal.

⁸ In conference in the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia, on 24th Sep. 2008.

Narrative Depictions for a Tourist Market (from his earlier works to 2004)

Young Rember Yahuarcani learned to paint in order to sell his works to tourists. His father taught him and his siblings what and how to paint. These works depict Huitoto traditions on a natural surface, the bark of the *ojé* tree named *llanchama*. According to Yllia, since the 1980s, native groups have been using *llanchama* as canvases for painting their culture in response to tourist affluence and the resulting demand for souvenir production (2003: 7). Since then, Yahuarcani usually prepares the *llanchama* with his father. On sunny days, it takes almost three days to prepare the bark surfaces. They have to cut the tree and hit the log with a machete handle until the bark comes off. The bark is then turn inside out and hit again over a flat surface. Finally, the bark is washed, cut, and dried. In order to paint the *llanchama*, they use a *Piri Piri* twig, which is strong enough to withstand the harshness of the material. In this first period, Yahuarcani painted only with natural dyes giving an opaque color to his work. In general, his depictions represented scenes of Huitoto daily life and rituals (fig. 1 - 2). He shares an ethnographic narrative style with other native painters. His self-location as a native painter for the touristic market is evident in his signature and the information given: *Rember Yahuarcani / Pebas-Loreto-Perú/ Huitoto-Aymenu / (the year)*. It was during this time when he took part in the *Serpiente de Agua* workshops. For the exhibition *La Soga de los Muertos*, Yahuarcani participated with his work *Aima* (fig. 3), piece that announced the next stage of his pictorial development.

In Transition. Mythology as a Breaking Point (2005 – 2007)

In *Serpiente de Agua*, Rember Yahuarcani met key people within Peru's cultural sphere, including Gredna Landolt, Pablo Macera, and Christian Bendayán, among others. He also met Victoria Morales, a member of Museo de Artes de San Marcos's art staff, who would eventually become Yahuarcani's best friend and his main mentor regarding the Limeño art system: "She told me if you want to survive here you have to learn many things [...] And the people that can help you with the things that you do are these people." (interview 2009) Victoria Morales encouraged Yahuarcani to visit museums and galleries and to see as many exhibitions as possible. These experiences led him to embrace a personal, artistic exploration. This was a transitional period for Yahuarcani. His compositions moved from a focus on daily life, landscapes, and ritual

practices to evocations of the Huitoto mythology in his own language. In sum, mythology provided him with a visual vocabulary. As a result, Yahuarcani found himself entangled in the complexities of Amazonian myths. He approached them either by depicting whole myths or episodes in a narrative way (fig. 5) or by depicting mythological characters (fig. 6). In addition to employing natural dyes, Yahuarcani began to paint the *llanchama* with acrylic paints. His self-perception and representation also changed. His signature was shortened to *Rember Yahuarcani / (the year)*.

A Personal Artistic Language. Emphasizing Mythological Characters (2008)

In 2008, Yahuarcani found his pictorial language. He began to rely on Huitoto mythology, his contact with other artworks, and his increasing knowledge of art circuits. His talents and constant experimentation led him to develop his own artistic proposal. During this period, he painted the *llanchama* with acrylic colors predominantly while choosing to focus on one or two mythological characters rather than depicting the myth (fig. 7 - 8). The attributes of those characters are informed by his knowledge on the Huitoto myths. These figure(s) are frequently located at the centre of the painting. The background usually alludes to features of the specific myth in which the character appears. Here, I would like to emphasize Yahuarcani's depictions of *Jitoma*.

Jitoma was the god who was transformed into a hummingbird to steal fire. He lived in an era in which there was no fire on the ground; everybody ate raw things. When it was his turn to eat, he didn't want to eat raw things, so he looked for the fire and became a hummingbird. The fire and its owners were above, *Jitoma* he told his brother, 'I will transform into a hummingbird and I'm going to go and steal the fire.' Then he flew and got into the fire and brought the fire inside his peak. (Interview, May 2009)

For Yahuarcani "*Jitoma* is sun, hummingbird, and man." Referring to Huitoto mythology, the artist selects the features of the character. Its different attributes regarding forms, colors, and actions are visualized and recombined in diverse ways in the *Jitoma* depictions. In his work *Jitoma* (fig. 7), *Jitoma* has a human's face and legs. His humanity is reinforced by his Huitoto facial painting and his holding of a hunting arrow. He also has a beak, one wing, and the avian tail of a hummingbird. The bright color of his body resembles the light of the fire. In his work *Rember y Jitoma* (fig. 6), *Jitoma* is represented as a sun-man. His color evokes the sun, but his human form and necklace suggest that he is

also a person. A large bird wing embraces the two figures. Both pictures are informed by *Jitoma*'s transmutational attributes, but with different combinations and intentions.

This type of work composes Yahuarcani's first solo art gallery exhibition. *Llanchama: Sólo pieles*, presented at the gallery 80m² Arte&Debate and curated by Armando Williams and Doris Bayly, constitutes a milestone in Yahuarcani's career. In this exhibit, his work is placed in an important contemporary art venue that allows it to achieve more powerful modes of circulating through the art circuit and market. The curators affirmed, "With this show, Rember Yahuarcani marks a turning point with respect to his previous exhibitions." (Williams and Bayly 2008)

De-contextualizing Characters on a New Support (2009 – until now)

Throughout 2009, Rember Yahuarcani's appeared in several exhibitions. At the beginning of the year, he presented his work in Buenos Aires' Centro Cultural Recoleta. At the end of the year, his work appeared in Lima in two parallel shows: *Horizonte sin Memorias* organized by the Museo de Arte de San Marcos, and *Once Lunas*, a bi-personal show with Santiago Yahuarcani, curated by Giuliana Borea and David Flores-Hora in the Pancho Fierro gallery. In these two latter exhibitions, Yahuarcani's pieces evoked mythological characters, however, several of these characters revealed two new paths with respect to his artistic experimentation. In previous works, emptiness had no place. Entire backgrounds were full of elements, full of undulating references and forms taken from myths and nature. In these later works, Yahuarcani begins to give more space and independence to his characters (fig. 9 - 10). Now, they are not always in an Amazonian environment. In several of his pieces, his images appear on monochrome backgrounds; they are de-contextualized. In this group of works, his brushstrokes are softer due to the new surface allows it. He starts painting on canvas. This new support also allows Yahuarcani to work with new scales. The *llanchama* support cannot be larger than approximately 1.5m x 2.5m, because its size is determined by the width of the tree. By painting on canvas, he can manage larger surfaces. In sum, through these kinds of explorations, Yahuarcani challenges his own pictorial practice. At the time, this demonstrate his artistic flexibility that breaks stereotypes,

Under the rules of art rules, if a person from the Coast arrives and begins to use materials from the Aymara and Andean culture, they say, 'This guy is innovating.' But, when a native uses those same materials, they say 'This is bullshit.'

The surface and the materials were not part of the circuit, and I want to show that I can also use the materials that they use. (Yahuarcani, interview Dec. 2008)

Moving Away from “Staged Authenticity”

The art world is highly performative. In addition to the artistic quality of artworks, there is the ever-present issue of *being* an artist. Self-representation and the marketing of the self influence the consumption of artworks and the location of artists within the art system (Thompson 2008). Yahuarcani knows this. The staged authenticity (MacCannel 199) and indexes of authenticity (Cocklin 1997) that are put in motion by indigenous leaders within the political realm is a cultural asset that some indigenous artists evoke as a part of their participation in the art scene. Nonetheless, this is not Yahuarcani's strategy regarding self-representation. Instead, he presents himself by contesting “authenticity.” Through his experience in Lima and his engagement with the art scene, Yahuarcani has acquired an artistic vocabulary and a particular kind of body language. His way of dressing and performing has changed. He does not emphasize his cultural traditions in these aspects, as he does as sources for his discourses, literature⁹ and artworks. Ethnicity and belonging do not constrain subjects, mentalities, and expressions. I wish to clarify here the ways in which this paper understands the categories that I have employed. When categories such as “Amazonian Art” or “Latin American Art” intend to pigeonhole artists and they're practices, they mainly tie territory – people - themes or aesthetics.¹⁰ In the case of this study, this limiting formula entails: produced in the Amazon by indigenous people and about Amazonian topics (which are usually seen as part of a collective cultural tradition). If many artists fit into this formula, others do not. There are urban Amazonian mestizo artists producing in the Amazon and outside of it. There are mestizos non-Amazonian artists that the Amazon informs their works, and there are native artists whose pieces are informed by other visual traditions and experiences. These artists might distance themselves in different levels from Amazonian

⁹ Rember Yahuarcani is also a writer. In 2009, he won the first prize of competition “Carlota Carvallo de Núñez” which was awarded as part of the events held in the 30th Lima Book Fair.

¹⁰ This aspect has been strongly discussed by several scholars (see Richard 2007, Sullivan 2000, Ramírez 1992).

cultural narratives and practices. “Amazonian art” and other categories can be helpful tools for the circulation of works, their exhibition, and for the market. They are also helpful analytical tools for dealing with systems of objects and practices. They are not, however, helpful when are used to encapsulate artists and topics under the exercise of new forms of reductionism and power domination.

I argue that Yahuarcani puts in practice “technologies of appropriation” (Schneider 2006) to acquire competence within the contemporary art field. Arnd Schneider understands technologies of appropriations as being the different levels of engagement those artists have with original cultures and the practices they use to incorporate difference into their work (2006: 183).¹¹ He also states that a “crucial question is, who appropriates what, where, and from whom. This implies situating practices of appropriation in different power relations.” (2006: 23) Considering power relations, I wish to address the multiple directionalities of these technologies of appropriation, where, for instance, Indigenous artists appropriate Western artistic styles, imaginaries or even practices for their participation in certain circuits. Nonetheless, these appropriations of topics and performances are still being seen with some reluctance, as Yahuarcani mentions (see quote above).

On December 3rd 2009, the *Once Lunas* exhibition was opened. In the days before, the curatorial text was sent to the gallery. I thought the perspective addressed on the text was clear. It concluded by saying, “*Once Lunas* is a generational and visual dialogue. Father and son begin from a shared worldview, which they use and reconstruct to generate a [H]uitoto calendar where the real and the unreal have no limits.” Specifically it mentioned how Rember Yahuarcani’s, “work anchors its roots in the [H]uitoto culture but expands its multiple branches to different visualities and spheres, generating a hybrid and totally contemporary proposal.” However, in the gallery press release, Santiago and Rember Yahuarcani’s works were discussed as a reflection of the Huitoto worldview. Moreover it included phrases, such as, “Within their art practices, a contained happiness is clear, which communicates a fresh sensation that captivates the visitor.” The exhibition was made public within an exotic cultural discourse that lessened artistic individuality.

This fact motivated me to explore how Yahuarcani’s exhibitions were divulged. The formula was the same. While the curatorial texts communicated hybridization and

¹¹ In this “ethnographic turn” (Foster 1995), artists usually include fieldwork and interviews into their methodological artistic repertoire while also flirting with anthropological approaches to cultural difference (Schneider and Wright 2007: 3). In my dissertation, I have also examined the work of the mestizo artist Harry Chavez, which is influenced by Amazonian as well as other traditions.

contemporarity in the exhibition space, the promotional reports reinforced stereotypes within local and national mediascapes. In attempting to attract people, the media focused on discourses of culture and tradition. In more specialized reviews, Yahuarcani's work was scantily mentioned as part of art critical writings. I argue that the lack of critical art writing on artworks produced by indigenous artists implies either a no-recognition of their work as a type of art that deserves a critique (a perception that has already been superseded) or a certain paternalistic view towards the person producing the work of art. Diego Otero's and Elida Roman's reviews are few exceptions. However, the latter insists on the relation between Yahuarcani's art and its spontaneity (Luces, *El Comercio*, July 11th 2010). Critical writing, as well as other examples, regarding the specific work of indigenous artists is an important task with regard to any attempt to enlarge the art scene. It entails a demystification of the untouchability of the "indigenous" artist and the location of him/her in a more grounded art sphere.

In addition, other tensions emerge from Yahuarcani's participation in the art market. In a talk held as part of his exhibition *Llanchama: Sólo pieles* in the gallery 80m² one of the speakers mentioned,

In his artwork there is no intention to find a market. As he has said, "I don't like to be called an artist." This is what gives him honesty... he has value because he is unique and his work is true...he is not in the magazines, what I value about Rember is that he is sincere with himself.

This speech was given in the art gallery in which Yahuarcani was exhibiting. Yahuarcani's participation in this market space entailed a clear intention of selling his work. In an interview talking about the market Yahuarcani told me, "Before I sold more, but cheaper... I had to sacrifice selling because of the offer price. I can lower my prices a little, but not so much." (December 2008) Accordingly, the ideas of "being honest," "being out of the market," "out of the magazines" were exaltations that prevailed the exotic and honest "other" over the "individualist western art sphere" and the market. A market viewed as a "hostile world" (Velthius 2007). The audience's comments adopted this tenor. Therefore, the specific reception of his work and discourse is still in tension. However, as I have addressed in this piece, Yahuarcani's art practice and new curatorial discourses are enlarging the art system and also impacting other spheres by contesting stereotypical perspectives. In doing so, these visualities and narratives are putting forth new frames from which to understand contemporary art.



In 2010, in celebration of its 40th anniversary, the Museo de Arte de San Marcos presented its enriched collection of contemporary art. This collection provides an important visual narrative into the existent discourses regarding Peruvian art. Rember Yahuarcani's *cartographies of a Huitoto mythology* are now part of this collection.

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Fig. 1: *Convirtiéndose en Aima*, 2004¹²
Natural dyes on *llanchama*.



Fig. 2: *Inauguración de la casa*, 2004
Natural dyes on *llanchama*.

¹² Photographies: Victoria Morales.



Fig. 3: *Aima*, 2004
Natural dyes on *llanchama*, 108 x 106 cm.



Fig. 4: *Dueña del Pijuayo III*, 2005
Natural dyes and acrylic on *llanchama*.



Fig. 5: *Creación del Mundo por Buinaima*, 2007
Natural dyes and acrylic on *llanchama*, 145 x 219 cm.



Fig. 6: *Rember y Jitoma*, 2007
Natural dyes and acrylic on *llanchama*, 124 x 178 cm.



Fig. 7: *Jitoma*, 2008
Natural dyes and acrylic on *llanchama*, 40 x 54 cm.

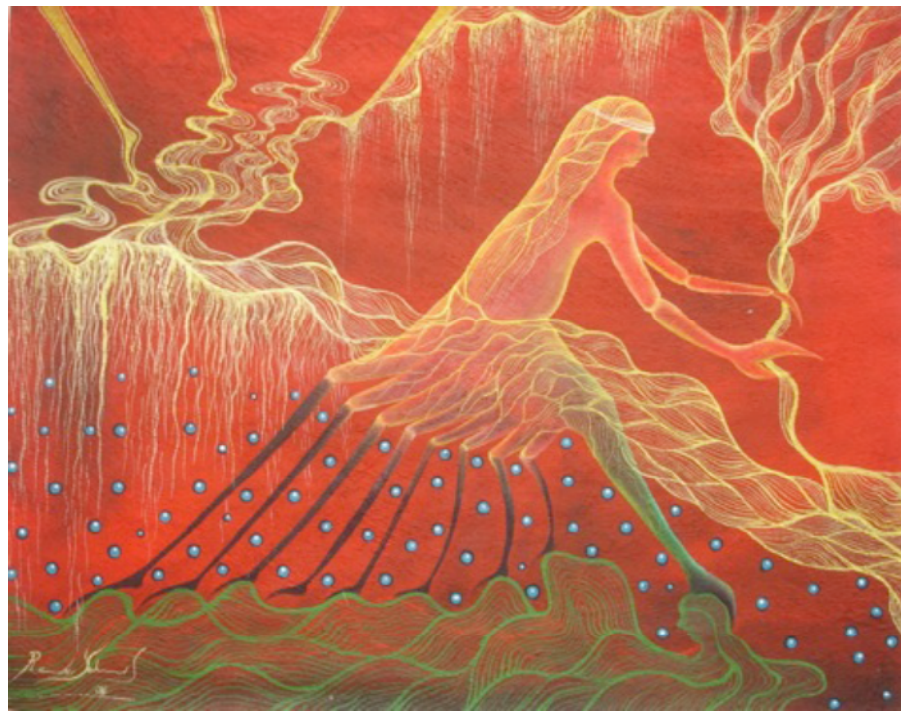


Fig. 8: *Mujer Cangrejo*, 2008
Natural dyes and acrylic on *llanchama*, 40 x 54 cm.

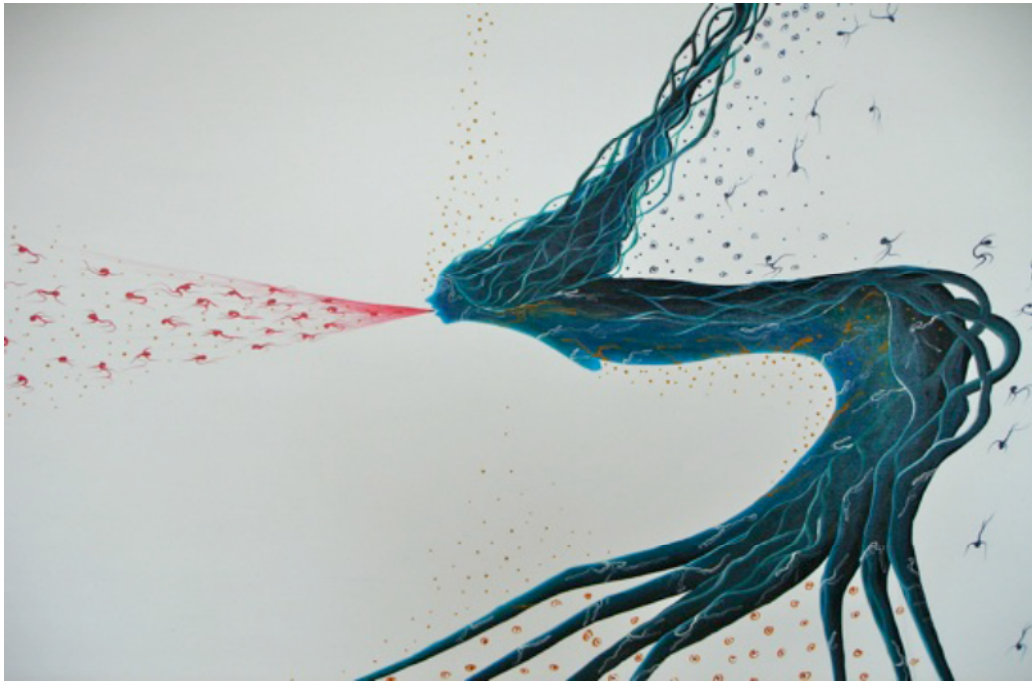


Fig. 9: *Marzo*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas, 99 x 117 cm.



Fig. 10 *Noviembre-Diciembre*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 150 cm.

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