

Press information

Yanomami

Spirit of the Forest

May 14–October 12, 2003

Press opening Tuesday May 13, 2003

with Davi Kopenawa and the artists,

from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Claudia Andujar

Lothar Baumgarten

Vincent Beaurin

Raymond Depardon

Gary Hill

Tony Oursler

Wolfgang Staehle

Naoki Takizawa

Adriana Varejão

Stephen Vitiello

Geraldo Yanomami

Joseca Yanomami

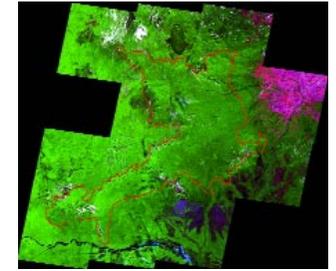
Volkmar Ziegler

Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain



Claudia Andujar, *Identity Series*, young Yanomami woman, Catrimani, 1976
© Claudia Andujar

Left to right:



Location of the Yanomami territory in Brazil
© 2003 François-Michel Le Tourneau (CREDAL-CNRS), CCPY and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris

Davi Kopenawa's speech at the General Assembly for the defense of the Yanomami territory, Watorikï, December 2000
© Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris

The Rio Negro, neighboring the Yanomami territory
© 2003 François-Michel Le Tourneau (CREDAL-CNRS), CCPY and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris

Mosaic of satellite images of the Yanomami territory (total surface area: 96,650 km²)
© 2003 François-Michel Le Tourneau (CREDAL-CNRS), CCPY and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris

YANOMAMI, SPIRIT OF THE FOREST brings international artists into contact with the shamans of Watorikï (*Windy Mountain*), a Yanomami village in the Brazilian Amazon. The ambition of this exhibition is not to lapse into exoticism or paternalism, but to connect our conception of images and representations with that of another culture. This show attempts to explore how the traditional yet constantly evolving metaphysical world of the Yanomami echoes the various facets of the “savage mind” still at work in our society. This exhibition brings forth a radical otherness in an endeavor to alter our perception and habitual modes of thought.

This exchange was organized in collaboration with the shamans of Watorikï and Davi Kopenawa, their spokesman. Within a period of several months, five artists traveled to Watorikï in a conscious effort to work with a single Yanomami community, thus achieving unity of place, time and action. In response to commissions by the Fondation Cartier, these artists allowed their individual creative worlds to be exposed to the Yanomami concept of shamanic images. The show structures itself on this idea of “free associations.”

Consequently, *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest* features neither tribal feather ornaments, nor any “Amerindian” or “crossover” art. Nor is this an ethnological or humanitarian exhibition. Treating Yanomami thought on an equal footing, this exhibition’s films, photographs, paintings, sculptures and video installations offer a web of correspondences relating to the major themes of the cosmological ideas and visionary experience of the eleven shamans of the village of Watorikï.

This exhibition is organized by the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain in collaboration with Survival International France and the Brazilian Pro-Yanomami non-governmental organization CCPY. It was conceived by French anthropologist Bruce Albert (research director at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Paris) and Hervé Chandès, Director of the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain.

With Survival International France, the Fondation Cartier is a financial contributor to the CCPY’s bilingual education program for the Brazilian Yanomami.

THE YANOMAMI IN BRAZIL The word “Yanomami” means “human being”. The Yanomami are hunters-gatherers and horticulturalists who inhabit a part of the Amazonian tropical forest on either side of border of Venezuela and Brazil. In Brazil, their population of approximately 12,500 lives in 185 villages and communal houses situated in the north-Amazonian states of Amazonas and Roraima.

Their first sporadic contact with white men—essentially military of the Border Commission, members of the Indians Protection Service (SPI), latex collectors and explorers—occurred in the first decades of the 20th century. In the 1950s and '60s a number of permanent (Catholic and Evangelical) missions were set up on their land. It was only in the mid-1970s that they experienced more massive, destructive contact with their white neighbors.

This began in 1973-1976 with the opening of the northern section of the trans-Amazonian highway in the south-eastern part of their territory. Then came the threat of decimation by epidemics (malaria, respiratory infections) and the violence that accompanied the “gold rush” which attracted some 40,000 prospectors to the western part of Roraima state in 1987-1989.

However, although these invasions were highly destructive, they were also short-lived: 211 kilometers of the *Perimetral Norte* highway were abandoned to the forest in 1976 and most of the gold panners were progressively expelled from Yanomami territory after 1990. On both occasions, therefore, Yanomami society managed to escape depopulation and the total loss of their culture.

Thus, in spite of these tragic episodes and threats to their territory represented by various local economic interests (especially agricultural colonization and mining), the Yanomami today constitute the largest indigenous community in Brazil to have preserved their traditional way of life. They occupy a territory of some 96,650 square kilometers, which was officially recognized by a presidential decree issued in May 1992 during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since 1999 the Yanomami have been provided with medical assistance by URIHI (www.urihi.org.br), a Brazilian NGO funded by the National Health Foundation (FUNASA), a Brazilian state institution.

Another NGO, CCPY, founded in 1978, is running a campaign in Brazil in defense of Yanomami territorial rights. Since 1995, this organization has also run a bilingual education program designed to enable the Yanomami to defend these rights for themselves (www.proYanomami.org.br).

In parallel with the exhibition *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest*, the Fondation Cartier is financing a Yanomami ethnogeography project organised by the CCPY, the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD, Paris) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS-CREDAL). This project involves the

comprehensive mapping of the Yanomami territory using the most sophisticated satellite technology available today. This will enable the Yanomami to acquire a more global knowledge of their territory and thus to optimize the occupation and sustainable use of their land. At the core of this project, jointly led by Bruce Albert (IRD) and François-Michel Le Tourneau (CNRS), is the creation of a database using recent satellite images, complete with place names in Yanomami. Linked to this mapping project, a bilingual education program set up by the CCPY will enable young Yanomami teachers to interpret and use satellite images.

In the exhibition *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest*, a vast mosaic of these images will offer an unprecedented vision of the entire Yanomami territory in Brazil. This is one of the least-explored regions of Amazonia, on the edges of the Orinoco-Amazon interfluvium.

YANOMAMI SHAMANISM Shamanism, along with the complex rituals for dealing with death and the dead, is one of the pillars of Yanomami culture. Individual or collective shamanic sessions constitute a spectacular yet regular activity in Yanomami communal houses. Each village has at least one or two shamans and sometimes more than ten, as is the case in the Watorikî community.

In their own terms Yanomami shamans “bring down” and “make dance” images (*utupë*) of beings from the mythological origins of the world, especially those of human/animal ancestors from original creation (*yaroripë*). The shamans incorporate these “images” one by one as auxiliary spirits (*xapiripë*) in order to carry out various supernatural tasks for which the attributes or competences of these entities have been summoned.

These spirits appear to them in the form of tiny human-like creatures, which are compared to shining particles of dust. Always magnificently draped in colorful, luminous feathers, they dance slowly on big mirrors and never touch the ground. During these sessions, the shaman reproduces the special song and dance of each spirit, identifying with them one by one. Because of this process of identification with these images/spirits from the earliest times, Yanomami shamans are known as *xapiri thëpë*, “spirit people.”

The shamans’ main activity is to cure members of their community and to protect them from predatory powers which can be both human (bad allies or enemies) or non-human (evil forest spirits, enemy shamanic spirits). They are also responsible for ensuring the regular alternation of days and seasons, the abundance of game and the fertility of the crops and the forest. Lastly, if an old shaman dies, it is their job to prevent his orphaned spirit from cutting into the heavenly vault and thus causing it to fall, a cataclysm from which they believe the world originated and which could also provoke its end.

It is said that every future shaman is, from childhood, haunted by the strange dreams induced by the spirits as they fix their gaze on him. Later, guided by the elders, he will have to learn to see these spirits. The initiation of a shaman is both a painful and ecstatic process. For several weeks the shaman inhales *yākoana*, a powerful hallucinogen and his body is then dismembered, inverted and recomposed by the spirits. This is the price to be paid if he wants to be able to see them, learn their songs and make them work for him.

Raymond Depardon
Watorikĩ communal house (Amazonas, Brazil),
November 2002
© Raymond Depardon



By invoking, incorporating and combining images from the origins, Yanomami shamanism has developed a way of interpreting the reality of the world and of acting on its underlying mechanisms. It presupposes the shamans' capacity to transcend the barriers between the categories of beings that people the universe by embodying them one by one. This incorporation of originary images gives them the potential power to take on the subjectivity of all possible existences, whether human or non-human. The body of the shaman thus becomes the junction of the ontological unity of all existence or, in other words, a portal for a general knowledge of the cosmos.

ARTISTS AND SHAMANS AT WATORIKĨ *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest* is an exhibition that has been organized with the cognizant collaboration of the Yanomami community of Watorikĩ, Brazil. Most of the artists involved in this exhibition were guests in the communal house of the *Watorikĩ thëripë*, the "People of the Windy Mountain" at the foot of the Demini range in the Brazilian state of Amazonas.

In turn, Adriana Varejão, Raymond Depardon, Stephen Vitiello, Gary Hill and Wolfgang Staehle all stayed in this village. Accompanied by the French anthropologist Bruce Albert, they lived and worked in direct contact with the Yanomami, with Davi Kopenawa and the other ten shamans in Watorikĩ.

During her stay in Watorikĩ, **Adriana Varejão** engaged in a dialogue with the Yanomami based on her work on the dislocation and evisceration of the body and landscapes. The shamans in the village were greatly interested in her images and related them to their own cosmological references, such as the symbolic dismembering and inversion of the future shaman's body during his initiation, or the cannibal theme informing their theory of supernatural aggression (sorcery, aggressive shamanism, harmful spirits). The works that Adriana Varejão has been making for some ten years now, influenced by images of Brazil's colonial history as well as by Baroque painting, have taken on a completely new dimension in this context. Shamanic interpretation has led this artist to develop fresh new possibilities in her work.

Raymond Depardon, who has supported the work of Survival International France for more than twenty years, has made parallel films of a group of hunters and a group of shamans, marking the close interdependence of the shamanic world and the tropical forest. After hours spent with the hunters and attending the shamans' cure sessions, he attempted to find his place in this other world, between forest and spirits. "They knew that they were being filmed, but that didn't change them at all. I was a visitor. I was passing by. I was welcomed, received and even desired. They offered their image to someone who, before that, was not even aware of their existence."

Stephen Vitiello, a composer of electronic music, will present a sound installation which interweaves the different calls, noises and stirrings of the forest and the Yanomami voice as it retranscribes and interprets this aural universe in the codes of its mythological narratives and everyday symbolism. *Heã*, the title of the acoustic environment that he has created for the exhibition, refers to this cultural appropriation of forest sounds. *Heã* is the word used by the Yanomami to refer to the calls of certain birds and insects, which they consider as predictive signs or aural presages (announcing the presence of animals or fruit, the imminent presence of visitors or enemies, the arrival of a change of season, etc.).

During his stay at Watorikɨ, **Gary Hill** was fascinated by the way in which the shamans summon and incorporate mythological and cosmological images from the time of origins in order to develop a system for producing and transmitting meaning. In his own work, Hill often explores the striking moment of the appearance and disappearance of the image. On numerous occasions, he has used his own body as the basis of experimentation, in a sense that foreshadows his encounter with Yanomami shamanism and its process of giving corporeal form to mental images.

A pioneer of multimedia art, **Wolfgang Staehle** will present a kind of digital analogy of the supernatural image of the forest that the shamans have when they identify with the spirits inhabiting it. Going far beyond anecdotal illustration, he has produced a mental image of the landscape which, detached from his own reality, becomes abstract and timeless, thus visually echoing the “sur-reality” of the eternal reflective surfaces evoked by the shamanic visions. During his stay in Watorikɨ, the artist made a number of video sequences including 24-hour static-shot panoramic landscapes, one from Watorikɨ mountain, which the Yanomami think of as a home of shamanic spirits, and the other, a reverse shot, from the communal house/village towards the mountain.

While *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest* features contemporary artists whose concerns are in resonance with Yanomami shamanism, the project truly began with the work of the Brazilian photographer **Claudia Andujar**. Since the early 1970s she has, both through her camera and her activism, played a fundamental role in obtaining recognition of the Yanomami territory from the Brazilian government. The exhibition features an important ensemble of black-and-white photographs as well as a series of images reflecting the disastrous consequences of the Yanomami’s dealings with the world of white men. Her most recent photographs use superimposed images to refer to the multiple processes involving the incorporation and metamorphosis of images in shamanic thought.

Lothar Baumgarten is another artist who has spent much time among the Yanomami. In 1978-1979 he lived 18 months with the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco in Venezuela. During the 1980s, he stayed on several occasions with the Yanomami of Brazil, bringing back more than 72 hours of audio recordings, 9 hours of 16mm film material, many notebooks based on his dialogues with the Indians and several series of black-and-white photographs. One of these series will be presented in the exhibition.

In his film *Home and Forest* (1994) **Volkmar Ziegler** allows the Yanomami to express themselves directly in reaction to intrusion by whites. They speak here in their own language (with subtitles) and in their own villages. This film, the fruit of 5 years of work, can be said to give a voice for the first time to the most

isolated Brazilian Yanomami. They react to the events of their recent history, such as the arrival of missionaries, military and gold panners and also reaffirm the mythological and cosmological foundations of their society.

In the video installation that he will present for the show, **Tony Oursler** includes footage of shamanic cure sessions shot by Geraldo Yanomami, drawings of extraordinary animals by young Yanomami from the school at Watorikɨ, satellite images of the Yanomami territory, as well as his own images which explore the technological mimicry of mental images.

When the Yanomami shamans describe the animal ancestors, they present them in the form of magnificently colored tiny creatures surrounded by scintillating light, moving on mirror-like surfaces. This extraordinary visual magnificence is manifest in the imaginary bestiary which **Vincent Beaurin** will present in the exhibition. His aim here is to take his own “visions” as the starting point for giving form to the mental world of the Yanomami shamans.

Referring to a tale by shaman Davi Kopenawa, **Naoki Takizawa** has created an installation which evokes the dance of the mythological images of plants and animals from the tropical forest during shamanic rituals. These images, which become auxiliary spirits and descend upon a multitude of mirrors, are invoked by the shaman who perceives them as an infinite number of ever-changing light forms. Using a series of animal drawings made by Joseca Yanomami and other youth from Watorikɨ as well as a series of images of tropical plants, Naoki Takizawa has created a forest of mirrors that brings to mind this multiplicity of ever-changing forms.

Bruce Albert and Davi Kopenawa

The exhibition *Yanomami, Spirit of the Forest* has been made possible by Bruce Albert, anthropologist at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD, Paris) and vice-president of Survival International France, and Davi Kopenawa, shaman and spokesman for the Yanomami of Brazil.

Bruce Albert, who has been working with the Yanomami since 1975, is also co-director of the two NGOs (CCPY and URIHI) that are running health and education programs in the Yanomami's territory in Brazilian Amazonia (states of Amazonas and Roraima). He is fluent in one of the (four) Yanomami languages and every year spends several months in the Amazonian forest. It was his long-standing friendship with the Yanomami of Watorikî that made it possible to organize the artists' stays with the community there. He has known Davi Kopenawa since 1978.

Most of the members of Davi Kopenawa's family died in epidemics (measles, influenza) that hit his group of origin in the upper Rio Toototobi, Venezuela, in 1959 and 1967. Grief-stricken and perplexed by the mortal power of the white man, in the early 1970s Davi Kopenawa left to work for the National Foundation for Indians (FUNAI), serving it as an interpreter. This experience gave him a better knowledge both of the Yanomami territory as a whole and of the world around it. He subsequently settled in the village of Watorikî, where he married the daughter of the community's leader and oldest shaman, who initiated him into shamanism in the early 1980s. Faced with a new invasion of the Yanomami territory by gold panners and a new wave of decimation afflicting his people in 1987, he became committed to an unrelenting fight to defend the Yanomami and the forest where they live. In recognition of this he was awarded the United Nations Environment Program's *Global 500* prize.

Survival and the Yanomami

Survival International (www.survival-international.org) is a worldwide organization working to support indigenous peoples. It supports their determination to decide their future for themselves and helps them to protect their way of life, land and fundamental rights. The organization was set up in the United Kingdom in 1969 in response to concern at the grave situation of the Brazilian Indians. The French section was founded in 1978.

Survival International played a key role in ensuring the international impact to the CCPY's 14-year campaign for legal recognition of the territorial rights of the Yanomami in Brazil (1978-1992), and it continues to actively defend Yanomami territorial, cultural and civil rights in that country.

In addition to its active participation in these campaigns, the French section of Survival International set up an emergency health program in the state of Roraima in 1998, working with the European Union's humanitarian office, ECHO. This program led to the creation of the NGO URIHI, which is now in charge of medical assistance in most of the Yanomami territory in Brazil. Survival France also helps to finance the CCPY's bilingual education program.

The catalogue *Yanomami, L'esprit de la forêt*

French version

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22 x 28 cm, 192 pages, 200 color and black-and-white reproductions

Price: 40€

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Raymond Depardon
Hunters and Shamans, 2002 (filmstrips)
Color film, duration: 32"
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