ALMINE RECH

Carlos Jacanamijoy
Olor a tierra

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Almine Rech Paris, Turenne is pleased to present *Olor a tierra*, Carlos Jacanamijoy's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from January 11 to March 1, 2025.

The Transformations of the *Auca*

Multicolored bursts emerge, covering the surface of the canvas. The colors pulse, explode, and contract, while our eyes seek familiar reference points. Are these parts of the night sky? Of an underwater scene? Light filtered by a canopy of trees? The shapes disintegrate with dazzling speed. What revelation hides behind these colorful brushstrokes?

Carlos Jacanamijoy gives us a hint: “I like to paint from the *auca*’s point of view.” In Colombian folklore, the *auca* is a bogeyman who comes to punish naughty children. But in his native Amazon rainforest, the *auca* is a bold youngster who lives among the trees, an untamed trickster. The Inga, the indigenous people of Carlos’s homeland, the upper Putumayo, say that no one can really see the *auca*. As soon as someone is about to spot him, the *auca* transforms into rustling leaves, a running animal, a flying bird, or a crawling insect. How can you show the countless perspectives of a being that is pure transformation? A being who looks at the world as the wind, a tree, rain, a jaguar, or a hummingbird?

These ways of seeing are also myriad and protean. Going beyond the limits of eyesight, they evoke all the senses. “My vision is made up of multiple viewpoints. It is in the sky, under the water. It’s reptilian and vegetal. I paint with my senses, not with my eyes.” Carlos’s paintings are a visual kaleidoscope: the colors explode and the shapes begin to insert themselves. Suddenly, drops fall, as if water is seeping in everywhere, while stars appear in a crepuscular sky. Yet all this is fleeting. The eye glimpses a momentary shape and immediately it disappears. The stars turn into seeds that are sprouting, the water becomes the shaman's breath, the colors arrange themselves into dreamlike vegetation, evoking the landscapes of the Putumayo rainforest. “I see from below and from above, from inside and out, without time or space interfering.”

By bringing together multiple sensations, Carlos invites us to dissolve the boundaries to which we are too attached, through indolence or custom. The artist even blurs the differences between the senses. His paintings can describe a smell through its texture, sound, and especially its colors. His work enacts a kind of synesthesia that, instead of confusing matters, actually constitutes a holistic way of perceiving existence.

Missionaries worked to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. They condemned their customs and tried to make them conform to European values. The figure of the *auca* was demonized, merged with the monsters that populate the Western imagination. The *auca* went from the child of the forest to the bogeyman of the cities. Carlos experienced a similar rejection. When he left his native Putumayo to study art in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, he had to face all the prejudices from which indigenous people suffer. Through his art and his creative genius, he was able to challenge the stereotypes in which colonial society wanted to confine him. By developing his own visual language, he was able to liberate himself from the role of the “Indian” in the colonial imagination while still maintaining his connections to his origins. In fact, his origins are the source of his inspiration. Carlos was able to become a cosmopolitan artist because his roots are so deep. This is perhaps true universality: a person who conceives of the totality of existence by dialoguing with

a multitude of points of view, including non-human ones.

“The *auca*’s infinite potential for transformation is wonderful. For me, he is a symbol of the freedom offered by nature. A bird does not ask whether it is a bird or a stone. It simply flies just the way it is. A flower does not ask whether it is red or blue. It exists on its own.” Carlos learned this wisdom from his father, who communicated with the spirits of the forest, and his grandmother, who spoke to plants. “My paintings are a tribute to these memories that affected me powerfully in a very sensory way.”

Westerners find this holistic position of indigenous peoples difficult to understand. Western thinking is so used to defining differences when defining existence and to arranging beings in strict categories. Even worse, these categories produce boundaries that then justify hierarchy and domination.

Carlos’s work is liberating. By trying to dissolve boundaries and swap points of view, his paintings reconnect what the West has separated. His paintings have no center or periphery; everything is linked, as living things should be, whether they are indigenous, European, plants, thunder, rivers, jaguars, or the shapeshifting *auca.* “When I look at a European landscape painting, everything is very structured. The horizon separates the sky on one side and the earth on the other. The fields are very distinct, and there are clear edges around every tree and animal. It’s a vision that slices, separates, and organizes.” On the contrary, Carlos’s painting emphasizes on connections, including our relationship to nature, which is so important to the artist. Indeed, indigenous knowledge, from which he draws inspiration, insists on humanity’s close relationship to nature and to the other inhabitants of our planet. Indigenous thought does not analyze nature in order to use it like a thing. “We don’t want the earth we walk on, because we are an organic part of it.”

Like the *auca* that has survived the assimilation that the missionaries tried to impose, indigenous cultures have also resisted colonial violence. Their ancestral connections to the land where they live and their relationships with the inhabitants of the forest remain strong and evolving. Carlos’s work is a tribute to the strength and wisdom of his ancestors. But this homage is also a warning signal, a reminder of what we have lost by liberating ourselves from nature and the other beings with whom we share life. The ancients said that Janus had two faces that could simultaneously look toward the past and the future.

Carlos’s eye multiplies the gaze of the Roman god. Will we be able to answer his call?

— Leandro Varison, Head of Research at the Musée du Quai Branly