



La Biennale di Venezia

58. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

PAVILION OF PERU

at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia



Christian Bendayán. "Amazonas" ["Amazons"]. 2007. Oil on canvas 269x220cm. (Model for the *azulejo* mural to be exhibited at the *Biennale Arte 2019*)

Since 2016 the Patronato Cultural del Perú has taken responsibility and leadership in making possible Peru's presence in the Art and Architecture International Exhibitions organised by *La Biennale di Venezia*. With the support of *El Comercio* and *Fundación Wiese*, this non-profit private organisation announces the launch of the Pavilion of Peru in the 58th International Art Exhibition – *La Biennale di Venezia*, which will be held from May 11 to November 24, 2019.

Curator Gustavo Buntinx's proposal, "**Indios Antropófagos**," which shows Christian Bendayán's artwork, has been selected for Peru's participation in this Biennale Arte. Last year Buntinx's proposal won the national public contest organised by the Patronato with the support of the Peruvian Ministry of Culture.

What follows are fragments of the curatorial introduction to the exhibition:

TRANS TROPICÁLIA

“Indios antropófagos” is essentially a paradox: a postconceptual exploration of the fiery sensorial impact of Amazon culture on certain (neo)baroque horizons in contemporary Peruvian art. Christian Bendayán has been well recognised as one of the protagonists of that tropical eruption. The pulsion always throbbing in his work, however, is also energised by a critical reconsideration of the Amazon as a constructed image.

A *mise-en-scène* thus becomes a *mise-en-abîme*—or viceversa. An operation that is made evident by the rhetorical quotation marks that are an integral part of this exhibition's title: a visible act of citing related to the frequent inscription of similar phrases on early 20th century postcards showcasing exoticised images of jungle natives. Postcolonial subjects whose difference became exacerbated into an absolute otherness: the alterity of the supposedly 'primitive'—not the *primordial*—was hence used to justify the 'civilising' incursion of the State and the Market in the 'wild lands'.

At times those postcards prudishly overprinted false drapings on the naked presences. In other instances the intent was rather to eroticise the exposed anatomy, highlighting the carved and painted bodies. In a keen reversal of such procedures, Bendayán makes of those skin markings the cutaneous inscription of a morphing identity: an empowered sense of agency, playfully but gloriously incarnated by the grand *tableau vivant* of trans women posing as mythical Amazons in a 'barbaric' fantasy of sensualised garments and gestures.

What is extravagantly performed through these histrionic displays is the libidinal exchange of fluids between a sexual and a cultural transvestism. But the medium chosen for those promiscuous dealings suggests a transvestism of a third kind: the historical and urbanistic cross-gendering implied by the *azulejos* imported from Europe during the rubber boom's *belle époque* (1879-1912), and used as a precious architectural overlay for the reinvention of Iquitos as a *coquette* Iberian city ensconced in the heart of Amazonian darkness.

This aestheticism, however, coexisted with the wrought iron of the peculiar *Casa de Fierro*—the Iron House—assembled in the midst of the tropics with industrial elements allegedly manufactured by Gustave Eiffel.

Bendayán transfigures those modernising delusions not just through their imagery, but also in their very materiality: brightly coloured tiles and metal sheets are here the support of delirious and monumental allegories. Amongst them, the impossible—utopian—burning down of the *Casa de Fierro*, performed by reborn “anthropophagous Indians”—who are, in fact, a 'tribe' of transvestite 'cannibals', wantonly surrendered to the reciprocal devotion / devourment of their interpenetrable bodies.

This culminating image of a hedonistic apocalypse both parodies and incarnates the theories of cultural metabolisation advanced by the Brazilian Anthropophagous Movement in the 1920s. The result is a *Trans Tropicália*, empowered by a political, a poetical *jouissance*, as dazzling as the butterflies that a century ago fascinated Otto Michael: a German entomologist, enamoured of the wild, but also an artificer who repeatedly painted the gradual imposition of the 'civilised' skyline of Iquitos on the 'savage' jungle.

That friction, the fiction of *natura* and *cultura*, is what kindles Bendayán's incendiary visions —and their twistedly idyllic metaphors.

The butterfly is, of course, the paradigmatic, paradisiacal image of the 'natural' rainforest. But it is also the emblem of the radiance and the fantasy associated with the aesthetics of transvestism.

Art sublimated into artifice.

And post-conceptualism fused into the (neo)baroque.

(Gustavo Buntinx)

The Project has a series of special supports, for example, the musical composition by FIL UNO, cellist and composer from Iquitos, Peru. This edition is sponsored by *ICPNA-Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano*, which promotes the Peruvian art and culture, and the support of PromPerú, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cerámica San Lorenzo.

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Christian Bendayán. *Fila India* [Indian Line]. 2012. Oil on canvas 300x170cm. (Model for the *azulejo* mural to be exhibited at the *Biennale Arte 2019*)