



JESUS CASIMIRO

FEBRUARY 25TH - MARCH 20, 2018
OPENING FEBRUARY 25TH,
6-10 PM

CENTRAL FINE
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Introduction

In Latin America the Quechuasⁱ amount to 10-12 million people. Their language originated in the 5th Century in the central and western areas of what is now Peru. By the 15th century, the *Lengua General* (General Tongue, the denomination given to the dominant spoken Quechua) was established as the official language in the Inca Empire.

The Quechua language lacks an original written archive and its contemporary structure has been impacted by a myriad of changes, variations, repressions, prohibitions and linguistic mergings (mainly with Spanish and Latin).

The first accounts of attempts to establish a written register of the Quechua language date from 1540 by Fray Domingo de Santo Tomas, a Spanish priest. His writings on Quechua relied on the Latin alphabet and attempted, through phonetic transcriptions, to map a written archive or rather, attempt a translation of the language. He published his *Grammatica o Arte de la Lengua General de los Indios de los Reynos del Perú* (Grammar or Art of the General Language of the Indians of the Royalty of Peru) in 1560.

In 1608, Diego González Holguín published the *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Perú Llamada Quichua o del Inca*, written in Spanish, attempting again to translate and capture the rich nature of Quechua language.ⁱⁱ

In 1975, Peru became the first country to recognize Quechua as one of its official languages. Ecuador conferred official status on the language in its 2006 Constitution, and in 2009, Bolivia adopted a new Constitution that recognized Quechua and several other indigenous languages as official languages of the country. The major obstacle to the use and teaching of Quechua is the lack of written materials in the language, such as books, newspapers, software, and magazines. The Bible has been translated into Quechua and is distributed by certain missionary groups. Quechua, along with *Aymara* and other minor indigenous languages, remains essentially a spoken language.

In this text and exhibition, we will, yet again, as we usually do at CENTRAL FINE, deal with the power of language, its impotence, its dictatorial tendencies and its capacity to elude and embrace itself. We will approach Language's oppression, abstraction and fluidity. We will also observe, although briefly, the Quechua language's potential to convey tactility, as well as its capacity to bypass imperialistic notions of grammar, readings and their suffocating borders.

Jesus Casimiro

Jesus Casimiro's textiles are made by a self-devised weaving technique called Cateña that alludes to Luracataoⁱⁱⁱ, his birth-town. The people in Luracatao are called Cateños, which imbues Casimiro's weaving approach with a societal texture.

As mentioned earlier, the Quechua language lacks a unified and autonomous written archive and has therefore relied mainly on oral transmission and a codification of phonetics, grammatical structures, patterns, weaving techniques, symbolism, world views, and what appears to be or look like 'abstraction' for its preservation and dissemination.

A key aspect in this exhibition is the role of color in the Quechua language and traditions. Color has been codified and charged, specifically in a way that conveys a vast array of associations, concepts, ideas. Put together in this way, colors can and do narrate stories.

Let's take a look at this: The Quechua spoken in Salta (Argentina) differs from the Quechua spoken in Jujuy (Argentina), Peru, Bolivia, etc. What these variations share is an attempt at codifying society and nature through practices, what we call art, forms, colors, symbols, visual patterns and the mythological. In short: In the arts, abstract signs are preserved by the Quechuas as means of livelihood, communication, integration, and preservation of the identity of an oppressed and silenced group of people.

Such abstractions, far from being part of the 'empty signs of abstraction' or mere formalism, will show up in patterns, ceramic objects, choice of materials, as ways to comprehend the symbolic, the imaginary *and* the real as one.

Casimiro's body of work takes on the tradition of Quechua textiles and moves through its parameters weaving a personal approach that distances itself from what we understand as craft. This way, it enters perhaps what we call contemporary art, and in that resistance to the stratification of tradition, his praxis meets what we could see as Op-art, abstraction, etc. His weaving technique, (devised, developed and named by Casimiro), deals with political, sociological, historical and religious problems.

Casimiro's work then touches on the notion of Origin, the Original, etc. How? Well, the name of his invented weaving process ('Cateña') refers to the name given to the people born in his native Luracatao. Casimiro's *origins* are at stake here as well as the original ways of ancestral traditions in textile-making. Or the invention of one's weaving, of one's intersection within a sum of political and social knots and *fibers*.

Determined by color and its associations, Casimiro organizes his textiles in a chromatic lexicon pertinent to the Quechua culture, establishing linguistic relationships. In the symbolism and the codification of color in Quechua textiles, Red embodies a type of wisdom that is self-evident to the eye and a lack of red indicates times of peace. Green will point to agriculture, fauna, flora, and the contact with the Mother Earth or *Pacha Mama*, and so forth. White signals a type of intellectual labor, clarity of observation, a type of serene objectivity and the base of reality. Black stands for Time. Purple stands for Social Organization (*Ayllu*).

Casimiro's works tell an "unwritten" story through pattern and color, while remaining specific and open-ended. His works are abstract textiles built on a codification of color that could be read by the Quechuas. To us, they remain sustained in themselves, communicating a sum of associations vastly different from the stories they carry.

In the work *Río*, a bulging Black, blue and red textile undulates as a River. This river, with its red knots, is a sick river running through time, indicating pollution as blood as well as its impact on agriculture, explains Casimiro.

In *Kenko*, we see a 3D woven pattern that represents the trajectory of routes surrounding the mountains in Salta, Argentina. Those paths, with their sharp *quebradas* (breakages) are the routes that the Quechuas must walk in order to work or to return home after work. This is a story narrated in lines of color, involving the sun, the topography of mountains, labor, etc.

In *Paisaje Telurico* (Telluric Landscape), a free standing textile is pierced by threads or rays of colored wool coming down from the ceiling that cross what looks like a group of valleys and mountains that expand onto the floor. This landscape is seen floating between the ground and the sky, sustained by the codification of color and threads, knotted in a chain of associations that point to a continuum of signifiers.

This is key to understanding the Quechua point of view: What we call the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real are all interconnected and unified in a thread that considers them all, as one.

Casimiro's body of work presents a body of language under the oppressive force of dominant bodies, tongues and grammatical structures. His textiles are constructions and planes of resistance that, through the use of what we read as abstraction, provide avenues for sustaining themselves in a poetic space, that is in turn, an actor, a witness and an archive to a worldview by a large and silenced group of people. This 'silence' is cryptic (to us) and yet vibrant, defiant, charged by symbols, labor, mythologies. This 'silence' exists as protest, as tradition, as a Chaya,^{iv} manifesting what survives and thrives as a speech that is alive, changing, unwritten, permeable, and clear.

Diego Singh, Miami, 2018.

Jesus Casimiro was born in 1968 in Luracatao, Salta, Argentina. His works have been exhibited widely in Argentina and abroad. He is considered one of the great textile artists in the country. A selection of his numerous exhibitions include *Pushka in Time*, at the Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires and *Latin American Textile Artists*, Museo Nacional de Etnografía, La Paz, Bolivia. In Salta, his textiles have been shown at the Museo de Bellas Artes, House of Arias Rengell and the Museo Latinoamericano. Casimiro was awarded the prestigious Acquisition Prize at the *National Biennial of Textile Artists* in Argentina and was selected as the awardee in the exhibition *Contemporary Art and Textiles* at the Museo Nacional de Etnografía in La Paz, Bolivia. He has also participated a juror for textile arts at the Auchan Center in Lille, France.

On March 7th, Casimiro will present a publication on his work titled *Arte Calchaqui*, in conjunction with the exhibition *Escultura Mutante* at the department of Cultural Affairs at la Casa de Salta in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is his first solo exhibition in the United States and at CENTRAL FINE.

ⁱ Quechua: (/ 'ketʃuə/, in ame also / 'ketʃwɔ:/)[4], known as *runa simi* ("people's language"). The Quechua language, is an indigenous language family, with variations spoken by the Quechuas primarily living in the Andes and highlands of South America. Derived from a common ancestral language, it is the most widely spoken language of indigenous peoples of the Americas, with a total of some 10-12 million speakers. Approximately 25% (7.7 million) of Peruvians speak some variation of Quechua. It is perhaps most widely known for being the main language of the Inca empire. The colonizers initially encouraged its use, but from the middle of their reign they suppressed it. However, Quechua ultimately survived, and variants are still widely spoken today.

ⁱⁱ González Holguín, Diego: *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Peru llamada quichua o del inca*. See downloadable pdf here: <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/archivos2/pdfs/mc0033185.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Luracatao: a village and rural municipality in the Salta province in northwestern Argentina.

^{iv} Chaya: the Chaya implies a strong reaction against imperialistic tendencies, aiming to protest and to preserve marginalized cultural manifestations. Traditionally, the *Chaya*, is delivered as a protest in an oblique way: by poeticizing nature, financial need, or addressing imperialistic abuse and racism, political issues are expressed via the camouflage of the voice and music, in songs, in the northwest of Argentina.