

Shore Drift

The works in this exhibition are the result of my two stays with the Pirahã people in 2016 and 2017. The Pirahã people live in the southwestern part of the Amazon rainforest, along the banks of the Maici River. I was accompanying the Brazilian anthropologist Marco Antonio Gonçalves, who has worked with the Pirahã since the 1980s. I first contacted Marco in 2012 to find out more about the Pirahã and their language, which can also be communicated as a whistled, hummed, or shouted sequence of tones. I was also perplexed and fascinated by what I had read about their culture and way of life. Our conversations brought me to an understanding of the complexities of anthropological research and the ethical and political dimensions of working with indigenous groups in contemporary Brazil.

In 2013, he invited me to join him on his next visit to the Pirahã, under the following conditions:

- I would only be able to join if they accepted my presence.
- I would not be able to record or film without their consent and approval.
- I should not come with any pre-conceived ideas or projects in mind.

The Pirahã have a deliberately minimal reliance on material objects; an absence of what we call social, political, or economical hierarchies; and a complex and profound cosmology and philosophy of life. Theirs is a concrete alternative to our world, in all of its self-destructive folly. As has become evident in recent years, the indigenous cultures of the Amazon rainforest, like the rainforest itself, have never been in greater peril. Learning from these cultures and defending them against all threats is an urgent and necessary task and may in fact be vital to our survival as a species.

The images and footage on view were produced in close dialogue and collaboration with the Pirahã. During my second stay with the Pirahã in 2017, we exchanged at length with them about what I could offer in exchange for the privilege of being able to reside with them and produce these works.

They asked for two larger aluminum boats, so as to be able to access medical help by their own means. Other than Gonçalves, the only visitors they currently accept are the medical team of the FUNASA, the agency responsible for medical assistance to indigenous groups. The funds for the purchase of the boats, and for bringing them to them, are being raised by Nomads Foundation in Rome, as well as by the sale of an artist's edition that I am producing with the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris.

I describe my role in this project as that of a witness - one who observes in order to bear witness. The works in this exhibition do not aim to provide a synoptic representation of the Pirahã people and their culture, but rather to show something of the distance between their world and ours.

The works in this exhibition were produced with the sole intention of raising awareness, and providing a respectful window onto their world, so as to help protect it from intrusion, invasion, and destruction.