

Abstract

Home to the biggest ecosystem in the world, the Amazon is considered the lungs of our planet. In addition to its biodiversity, the Amazon also houses its biggest protectors: the native peoples of the region. However great, such an ecosystem of people and biodiversity is endangered. The lack of indigenous land recognition, the conflicts with loggers and settlers, and the lack of governmental support are the main problems that haunt such communities today. On the other hand, they have the support of many in their fight for the conservation of the Amazonian ecosystem and for the preservation of the local histories and enrichment of artistic endeavors. This research uses interviews with members of the Huni Kuin people, to understand how the arts, through painting, cosmologies, and a number of other expressions, have engaged in resistance, connection, and conservation of Indigenous History in Brazil.

Objectives

- To document through Huni Kuin People's point of view their art, techniques, and cosmologies.
- To correlate how Huni Kuin Artistic Expression has kept their costumes and people connected throughout adverse times.

Methodology

This documental research had two phases, the first involved looking at art, while the second one required field research. Both phases used qualitative methods. Firstly, a study of several Indigenous art pieces, mainly the ones produced by the MAKHU (Art Collective of the Huni Kuin people), was conducted. Such pieces were either found at MASP (the Museum of Art of São Paulo), MASP's Archives, and through Huni Kuin artists. The second part of the research took place in the Huni Kuin community in the northern Brazilian state of Acre, situated by the margins of Rio Jordão (Jordão River). Here a series of interviews with native Huni Kuin People were registered.

An Introduction to the Huni Kuin People

As reported by the Instituto Socio Ambiental, the Huni Kuin people belong to the Pano Linguistic family, and inhabit the Amazonian region of Eastern Peru, and the Western Brazil region of the states of Acre and Southern Amazonas. The Huni Kuin, or in a direct translation to English True Humans, speak their own language, called Hantcha Kuin. They have suffered from conflicts as early as the 18th century when colonizers organized slave-raiding expeditions to the region they inhabited. Systematic contact with outside people came throughout the 1940's and 1950's - a contact that, according to Iban Huni Kuin, they sometimes regret. Throughout their history, one thing has remained: their connection with their cosmology and with art. As put by Sales "Our art is passed by from generation to generation, it is our connection".

Findings

Huni Kuin's cosmologies revolve around one specific story: the legend of Ybeinu (Huni Kuin man) and Ybeshanu (enchanted woman/Anaconda). In a simplified context, the legend tells the story of an enchanted Snake who had a relationship with a Huni Kuin man. Through their relationship, the man uncovers mystical secrets, including the Ahayausca (Nixi Pae) - seen as their form of connection with past, present, and future. Their paintings, craftwork, geometry work, and sacred religious ceremonies are all based on this legend. It is important to understand the legend in order to understand the references in their work

Geometry as Sacred

Because of the story of Ybeinu and Ybeshanu, the geometry encountered in Boas, a sacred being in their culture, is much used in body paintings, artwork, and craftwork. Each detail in the geometry has a different meaning.

Singing and Chants

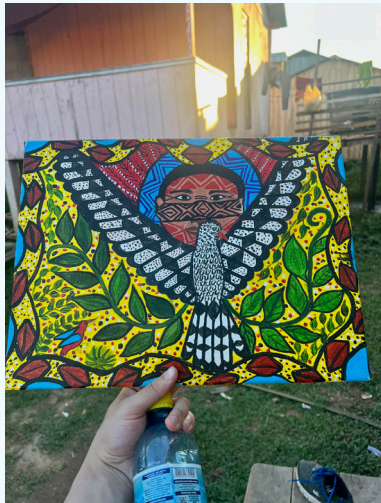
In their Nixi Pae ceremonies, the Huni Kuin people use of chants and singing to connect themselves with past and present while expressing themselves through music.



Images taken at the in-field research portraying the use of the sacred geometry in craftwork and body art.

Paintings

One of their main used media in art is painting. Through their paint work, they express their history and connection with their rich past at the same pace they trailblaze a better future for their communities.



Paintings, from left to right, painted by Rita Huni Kuin and Gilda Sales Huni Kuin - both members of the Xiku Kurumim Huni Kuin Village.

Conclusions

Through witnessing first-hand and listening to Huni-Kuin artists and other members of the Huni Kuin People it became clear that in their vision art is not only a form of expression, but rather a form of connection and resistance. It operated in their fight for cultural survival throughout the years. Their art keeps them together by promoting a sense of community in all members of the Huni Kuin village, as well as by passing generational knowledge, which is done through paintings, chants, ceremonies, and through material culture in general.