

The Jaguar and the Scarlet Bird

Denilson Baniwa and Paulo Fluxus
Molly Bertheaud
Marie-Danielle Duval
Helio Eudoro
Kimberly Orjuela
Maiko Rodrig
Martín Rodríguez
Glicéria Tumbinambá and Fernanda Liberti

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When was the last time you looked at an animal and saw yourself in it? Or that you perceived an animal as a complex being, with forms of communication and stories of its own? Animals and humans have an oscillating history, alternating between the roles of prey and predator, territorial disputes and, at the same time, coexistence and domestication. Since the beginnings of human life, this coexistence has been shaped by different sociocultural implications that depend equally on the type of society and worldview in which these dynamics developed. In this spirit, *The Jaguar and the Scarlet Bird* emerges.

This exhibition stems from an anti-colonial journey into the human-animal relationship that began during my doctoral studies. One of its central elements is the Tupinambá cloak and the constellation of the jaguar, a concept of cosmological recognition of different feline figures present in various Indigenous civilizations. Tupinambá feather cloaks, or assojabas, are sacred garments made before the sixteenth century from scarlet ibis feathers and are today reinterpreted by contemporary Tupinambá artists. The jaguar, meanwhile, is an ancestral figure and recurring symbol in many Indigenous communities and dissident movements across Abya Yala, the so-called Americas.

The exhibition brings together contemporary artists of Brazilian, Colombian, Mexican, American, and Senegalese backgrounds, working across sculpture, installation, video, painting, and tapestry. Rooted in Indigenous, Latinx, feminist, and Afro-diasporic perspectives, these works explore different dialogues between feline and avian figures to elaborate territorial, identity-based, and migratory narratives.

In the small gallery, a figure emerges: an elevated and illuminated presence. This is *The Cloak of Mato-Virgem*, by Helio Eudoro, which pays homage to Tupinambá cloaks. The work presents an allegory of the cloaks, narrating both their sacredness and their colonial wound, referencing one of the ancient feather cloaks in the collection of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels. Eudoro reimagines the aesthetic of the Brussels piece.¹

As they enter the Daniel-Dion and Su Schnee Gallery, visitors are prepared for an atmosphere of dimness, while listening to an audio recording of Denilson Baniwa (Baniwa people) reciting his poem *Flashes in the sky of the memory*. In this sound installation, Baniwa reflects on cosmologies and visions of kinship between his ancestors and nature, bonds torn apart by European colonization but which still echo, whether in an ancient tree or in the spirit of his jaguar grandmother.

Facing the entrance in the large exhibition room, *Elevated consciousness portal* by Kimberly Orjuela presents Amazons inspired by her pre-Columbian Indigenous ancestors, made of terracotta and mounted on protective jaguars. Flying above the feline guardians, birds welcome the visitors. Nearby, *Registro 2*, by Maiko Rodrig, comes into view. The artist combines industrial materials, analog film, and light to create retro-futuristic objects reminiscent of an apocalyptic bird.

Suspended from the ceiling is a geometric form woven with copper and thread by Martín Rodríguez. *Oído de Dios* references traditional Indigenous textile practices continued within contexts of Mexican popular culture and reinterprets them as a radio antenna resembling a great colorful bird. Working from his Xicanx identity across the Mexico/US/Canada borders, the artist activates the installation with sounds of birds and an emblematic pregón (street vendors' call) from Mexico City, highlighting the calls made between human and animal ancestors. The public then

encounters a gathering of sculptures depicting jaguars and fantastic birds. Another of Orjuela’s Amazons appears, surrounded by sculptures that combine birds and jaguars emerging from spirits the artist created in homage to Colombian palm trees.

Within this labyrinth, fabrics descend from the skylights, carrying projected light-based designs by Denilson Baniwa and Paulo Fluxus. The installation *Petroglyphs for an ancient future* brings together Baniwa’s traditional Indigenous petroglyphs, translated into laser by Fluxus, invoking animal spirits connected to the Baniwa cosmologies of creation. To the left, the video artwork *The Cloak in Movement* by artists Glicéria Tupinambá (Tupinambá people) and Fernanda Liberti is screened. Filmed in the *Serra do Padeiro*, traditional territory of the Tupinambá people of Olivença, the video shows Glicéria presenting the territory and transcending the senses while wearing one of the contemporary Tupinambá cloaks she created herself from the feathers of domestic birds, as well as the regeneration of fauna and flora brought about by its resurgence.

As echoes of ancient birds and felines mingle with the ambient sounds of nature, the visitor’s senses intertwine with the iconographies of other felines and birds. There, we discover two works by Molly Bertheaud: *The red ties that bind...wind* and *Unknown arrows*. Bertheaud presents a repertoire of fantastic figures that suggest an integration of women, birds, and felines through both coexistence and violence, creating metaphors about power, feminism, and self-construction.² The domestication of birds and the relationship of touch and intimacy between species is also recurrent in her work. The artist suggests an assimilation of the animal-body and animal-soul into the experience of womanhood.³

Returning to the end/entrance of this experience, Maiko Rodrig’s installation *Registro 1 (variation)* descends from a skylight like a beam of light or a scarlet bird that encounters a metal frame while diving; a comment on the persistence of nature despite the saturation of urban environments.

Finally, Marie-Danielle Duval brings the figure of the tiger to consider questions of self-representation. The artist transmutes traumatic ghosts connected to stereotypes and roles imposed upon Black women. In the drawing *Tiger, Tiger*, she depicts a real nightmare in which tigers sexually assault her. In the painting *What furnace forged your brain?*, she kills these same felines and challenges the equation of prey and predator by wearing the stripped skin of the male tigers, subverting trauma and carrying the predators with grace. The imagery presents a place of luxury and rest, historically denied to Black women.

This circuit does not seek to resolve or decipher all these animal–human relationships; on the contrary, it opens them further, inviting the audience to wander among them and discover their own meanings along the sinuous, mythological journey proposed by *The Jaguar and the Scarlet Bird*.

— Rodrigo D’Alcântara
Curator

¹ The Brussels assojaba is a patched and reformulated object that combines parts of ancient Tupi cloaks to conform to a colonial aesthetic, one that approximates the imagery of European royalty at the time.

² Some images from this almost-fable-like universe derive from studies of specific Indian mythologies concerning the spiritual world and the implications of these animals within social customs, as narrated by one of her grandfathers, who came from this culture.

³ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La frontera: la nueva mestiza*. Capitán Swing Libros, 2021.