

Karen Paulina Biswell + Maria Amilbia Siagama Siagama: *Adua*

07 March - 17 April 2025



Iguaka, 2021

Karen Paulina Biswell

Huxley-Parlour are delighted to announce *Adua*, an exhibition of works by Colombian artist Karen Paulina Biswell and Colombian Embera-Chami artist and cultural guardian Maria Amilbia Siagama Siagama at our Swallow Street gallery in March 2025. The exhibition, the title of which means *I don't know* in the Embera language, will present a series of mixed-media works including photography, textile pieces, and works on paper from the artists' ongoing collaboration. Together, their work explores the intersections of identity, ritual, and healing.

In adopting photography, Biswell confronts the medium's colonial legacies and the anthropological tendencies of photographic portraiture. *Adua* will present a suite of portraits, made by the artist over the last fifteen years, of members of the Embera-Chami community. Reimagining the analogue process of converting film negatives into a positive print, Biswell works with the negative to create vivid images that remain incomplete or indeterminable. In doing so, the artist seeks to reveal the inherent disparity in the taxonomic approach of ethnographical portraiture, and the polemics of an appropriation of 'the Other' into Western traditions.

Through their collaboration, Biswell and Siagama Siagama challenge this historical imbalance further. In a series of portraits of Biswell which are then expressively inked over by Siagama Siagama, Embera-Chami symbols are imposed onto the images, in a reappropriation of photographic processes and as an act of self-determination. Siagama Siagama's methodology centres on strategies of intervention; in her series *Cosmos +*, the artist employs jagua ink to draw over organic chemistry manuals, asserting her own language upon a foreign framework. In doing so, she offers a rebuttal to the systems that have sought to impose their own understanding on her indigenous community. Her work invites a deliberate unknowing - actively rejecting imposed knowledge in favour of an ignorance that allows for new perspectives to emerge.

Place is an integral site of inquiry to Biswell and Siagama Siagama's collaboration; the *Brugmansia Insignis* (iguaka) plant, native to Central and South America, is a significant point of departure for their combined practice, and a recurring motif throughout the works in the exhibition. In Embera-Chami culture, the flower plays a sacred role in rituals. When ingested, its hallucinogenic effects are believed to allow the consumer to pass back and forth from the underworld; new understandings of reality, operating through a process of knowing and forgetting, are triggered which reveal a more harmonious mode of existence, attuned to the ecosphere. Using the iguaka plant as an emblem, the artists point to the fractious relationship between the land and ancient traditions and the socio-political realities of Colombia. Invoking the natural landscape, Biswell and Siagama Siagama offer a narrative of transformation and locate a hopefulness in the principles of reciprocity.

Karen Paulina Biswell (b. 1983) grew up between Colombia and Paris. She studied Art History at the Sorbonne, Paris. She has been nominated for many international awards, including the Prix Pictet in 2019 and 2025, and was the Strike a Pose Festival (Germany) winner in 2021. Biswell has exhibited globally, with solo exhibitions across Europe, China, and South America. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris; the Collection des Rencontres de la Photographie, Musée Réattu, Arles; and the Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia, amongst others. Biswell lives and works in Bogotá and Paris.

Maria Amilbia Siagama Siagama (b. 1969) is an artist and cultural guardian of the Emerba-Chami community. Exploring ritual, dreams and the natural environment, her work depicts forms of Ember-Chami culture rooted in traditions of body painting. Predominantly working with ink on paper, using jagua ink from the Jenipapo tree, she seeks to represent the invisible and visible worlds. An upcoming monograph *Wandu Wandu* brings together her work to date, published by Relampago. Siagama Siagama lives and works in Risaldra, Colombia.

The exhibition is accompanied by a commissioned text from Colombian curator Natalia Valencia Arango.

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Adua [I don't know]

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Private View 06 March, 6–8 pm

HUXLEY-PARLOUR

3–5 Swallow Street, London W1B 4DE

Opening Hours Monday to Friday, 10:00am - 5:30pm

Saturdays, 1:30pm - 5:30pm

Entry is free

More information can be found online at www.huxleyparlour.com