

Press Release

Claudia Alarcón and Silät

Nitsäyphä: Wichí Stories

5 October - 3 November 2023

*'I know of this story, told by the people. There was a day, long ago, when women lived in heaven. They descended from time to time here to earth. They brought their chaguar, and they made threads upon threads when they arrived. They glided by means of a chaguar rope that hung from the sky. When they landed, they sat down to make thread and weaved, all of them very beautiful.'*

- Delfina Díaz, from the Wichí El Buen Destino community.<sup>1</sup>



Claudia Alarcón, *Kates tsinhay* [Mujeres estrellas / Star women], 2023

Cecilia Brunson Projects is delighted to present an exhibition of textile art by Claudia Alarcón and Silät, a collective of artists from the Wichí communities of Santa Victoria Este, Salta, Argentina. This is the artists's first UK exhibition, produced in collaboration with curator Andrei Fernández, and follows 2023 presentations at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires and at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, New York, alongside Thañi, a wider group of weavers from the region. This exhibition constitutes a radical recasting of Wichí textile traditions, inherited methods of production translated only in recent years into large-scale artworks, which have provided a means for women across generations to transmit contemporary Wichí culture into the webs of international art dialogues. These artworks signify at once a collective response to changing dynamics between Indigenous communities and a

wider world, and individual impulses to express creatively and imaginatively.

The weaving of textile objects from vegetal fibres produced from the local chaguar plant is fundamental to the visual culture, narrative history and economics of the Wichí people. Its centrality is articulated in a mythological tale, in which beautiful women, living in the sky as stars, would travel down to earth on woven chaguar ropes to dine on the fish caught by fishermen. Upon discovering this, the men employed the help of birds to snap the ropes and the women were trapped on earth for evermore, but continued to weave and pass knowledge of the world above onto their daughters. The parable suggests a passage from the naivety and freedom of childhood to the societal responsibilities of adulthood; girls are taught to spin chaguar and weave functional objects from the age of 12, their creations a way to provide financially as well as to sustain ancestral cultural practices. In another sense, learning to weave presents a further awakening, an entryway into a collective conversation between the women of the Wichí communities; the textiles, formed of geometric motifs drawn from the surrounding environment, are a method of communicating unspoken thoughts within a culture that values highly forms of non-verbal expression, and the messages found within dreams and subconscious intuition. Silät, the name adopted by the artist collective, means 'information' or 'alert,' and reflects the role of textiles to convey messages and thoughts.

*"We are honoured to be able to bring the extraordinary work of Claudia Alarcón and the Silät collective to London, following their recent exhibition at The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard. We thank curator Andrei Fernández who has supported and mentored Claudia and the collective since 2015 in their remarkable evolution of traditional weaving techniques, and who recently completed a residency at Delfina Foundation. These stunning chaguar tapestries explore new variations in form and imagery, opening a door to narratives remote from our own yet universal and relevant to the globalised world of today."*

- Cecilia Brunson

<sup>1</sup>Díaz, Delfina, "Women Stars" in María Carri (editor) Thaíí, Andrei Fernández, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, Elerio María (authors), Silät, Center for Curatorial Studies Bard College, Buenos Aires, 2023, 117.

*Public Programme:*

Thursday 5 October, 6-8pm - Private View

Friday 13 October, 11am-1pm - Frieze Brunch; in conversation with Sofia Gotti (Venice Biennale)

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*Artist Biography:*

Claudia Alarcón is an artist from the Wichí La Puntana community in Salta, Argentina. She was taught to weave from the age of 12 and to produce fabrics from the local chaguar plant. She identifies the potential for artmaking within these traditions, to promote a communion between Wichí history and contemporary culture and social politics. In coordinating the production of the Silät artist collective, and leading experimentations in material and subject matter within their practice, Alarcón supports creativity, independence and self-sustaining practices amongst Indigenous women. Alarcón was awarded the Ama Amoedo Acquisition Prize at Pinta Miami in 2022, and her work is represented in the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Salta, Argentina. She was also the first Wichí artist to receive an award at the National Salon of Arts in Argentina in 2022.

Andrei Fernández is an Argentinian curator, working in Salta in the triple border area between Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. Her curatorial practice is centred around collective memories, disputes over identity and territorial issues, as well as investigations into 'fluid authorship' and the notion of inheritance within indigenous artistic practices. Andrei has a degree in Fine Arts from the Faculty of Arts of the National University of Tucumán (UNT). Since 2019 she has been working on "La escucha y los vientos. Stories and inscriptions of the Gran Chaco" a project initially supported by ifa-Galerie Berlin and exhibited in Germany, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. In 2023, she completed a residency at Delfina Foundation in London. Fernández is part of a foundation that works to support artists from the north of Argentina, FACT (Fundación para el arte contemporáneo de Tucumán) and a cooperative project called NVS based in Lisbon.