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Artist Claudia Alarcón And Silät Expand The Language Of Ancestral Weaving

At Cecilia Brunson Projects in London, Wichí artist Claudia Alarcón and the Silät collective present ancestral weaving as a living, expressive language.

By [Nargess Banks](#), Senior Contributor. © Nargess Banks covers the arts, wit... [Follow Author](#)

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Detail of Claudia Alarcón & Silät, *Wenschelamejen (Lo diferente/The Other)*, 2025, hand-spun chaguar fiber, woven in yica stitch
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

Light filters through the warp and weft of hand-spun fibers from the chaguar plant, catching the intricate patterns of tapestries that float delicately from tree-branch structures suspended from the ceiling at Cecilia Brunson Projects in London. Others are more conventionally framed and hang on the walls, yet they too retain this quiet majesty. The longer you observe, the more each reveals its unique language of color, of texture, of form.

These are the works of Claudia Alarcón & Silät, a collective of over 100 women from north-west Argentina's Wichí, one of the largest Indigenous communities of the Gran Chaco region. Led by artist Claudia Alarcón, the group has long practiced the craft of weaving fishing nets and bags, sold in local markets, one example of which is included in the exhibition.

Though delicate in appearance, the artworks here carry weight. This is far from craft. Each piece reveals skills and knowledge passed down through generations; they tell stories of then and now, the Wichí people, their hopes and dreams.



Claudia Alarcón & Silät, *Wenschelamejen (Lo diferente/The Other)*, 2025, hand-spun chaguar fiber, woven in yica stitch
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

"Choreography of the Imagination" follows Claudia Alarcón & Silät's inclusion in "Foreigners Everywhere/Stranieri Ovunque," the main exhibition at last year's Venice Biennale. Curated by the Brazilian artist Adriano Pedrosa, it brought the collective, and many other previously overlooked Indigenous voices, into the global art spotlight.

At Cecilia Brunson Projects the exhibition highlights the rich tradition of geometric abstraction in South America. Here in London, Alarcón & Silät collective are also responding to the works of many European and North American modernists, in particular Bauhaus émigré Anni Albers, who along with her husband, the artist Josef Albers, travelled extensively through Latin America from the 1930s to the 50s. She was especially drawn to Indigenous weaving techniques, particularly those using chaguar fibers. Albers saw weaving not simply as craft, but as a form of visual language: structural, symbolic, expressive.



Claudia Alarcón and members of the Silät collective weaving
ANDREI FERNÁNDEZ AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

For the Silät collective, these skills are woven into their beings. This is ancestral knowledge, passed and enriched through generations, with the artists actively seeking to preserve some of the lost traditions. Alarcón, for instance, is relearning the complex punto antiguo (antique stitch). The examples included in the exhibition are the only artworks individually signed by the artist.

At Cecilia Brunson, each of these artworks invites a conversation with past and present, an interpretation of language, of individual and collective thought. The artists here are not only continuing a tradition, they're reclaiming it as a living, experimental language, resisting the idea that ancestral design must remain static or anonymous.



Claudia Alarcón & Silät "Choreography of the Imagination" at Cecilia Brunson Projects
LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

I connected with Claudia Alarcón to explore her work, the practice of the Silät collective, and what it means to be exhibiting on the global stage.

Nargess Banks: With your work resisting individual authorship, embracing instead a collective process and group authorship, how do you navigate the tension between each artist's voice and the shared identity of the group?

Claudia Alarcón: Within the Silät collective, we work in unity. We divide into groups to weave the pieces; each group brings unique proposals to the compositions, and we reach agreements on the color palette based on a theme we all decide on together in an assembly. For example, we have worked with the cycles of time, the story of the star women, and the story of the origin of the rivers. We make these works using the stitch we always use to make bags, a technique that all the women in my village know.

I am personally exploring shapes with an ancient stitching technique that not many women know how to do. In these pieces, I am developing a language of my own, but always honoring my foremothers and my entire village, its resistance and its imagination.

Banks: How would you describe the collective artwork?

Alarcón: In our textile works, there is no tension; there is abundance. We are weavers from a people who never stop weaving, who repeat forms, defend forms, and in that process, create, invent, and dare to expand the possibilities of making. We believe it is always very important to insist on the communal, on the plural. We are creating something new with Silät.



Claudia Alarcón, *Los saltos de mi recordar* (The leaps of my memory), 2025, hand-spun chaguar fiber, woven in antique stitch
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

Banks: The works are as much about technique as they are about memory. How do you decide what to preserve from ancestral weaving traditions, and what to evolve or reinterpret?

Alarcón: Like many weavers, I work somewhere between technique and ritual. I weave myself. Weaving is healing, and it is also an act of remembering. Within me, there is a continuity—we can call it tradition—but along the path we've walked in recent years, I found the impulse to break with certain repetitions and orders we no longer wished to uphold, because the world has changed, and so have our desires and needs.

I continue to weave as the women of my village have always done. With chaguar plants that grow freely, that we go out to gather in groups, walking through the forest, that we spin against our bodies, that we weave in silence, imbuing the threads with the colours of our land.

The weaving technique doesn't change; what changes is the scale of the weaving, the way it's displayed. It changes in that I now bring together multiple patterns in a single piece, patterns that were once kept separate, as well as shifting planes. I always say that what we do is like opening a path, clearing a space so we can move, daring to lose ourselves in order to discover things we didn't know before.



Artist Claudia Alarcón with chaguar
ANDREI FERNÁNDEZ AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

Banks: That is very beautiful. What do you hope the international audience, many of whom unfamiliar with your culture, will learn from this?

Alarcón: I hope that those who encounter our works can come to know us, value us, and respect us.

Banks: In re-learning techniques lost over time, how does your own act of rediscovery shape the dynamic between you and the Silät weavers, and what does that say about authorship in this context?

Alarcón: I learned the technique we call punto antiguo a few years ago. Only a few elder women in my community still practice it. Its transmission had been interrupted because it's a very slow technique and requires more thread. It used to be employed to make vests, garments, or even a kind of armour for times of war. It doesn't stretch like the stitch we call punto yica, which has always been used to make gathering and carrying bags. Women weren't able to sell pieces made with punto antiguo at a good price, so that discouraged its continuation.

I didn't learn it from my mother, but from a fellow member of the collective, Estela Saavedra, thanks to the exchange workshops we organized with Andrei Fernández and a public institution in Argentina, INTA. With this technique, I'm exploring different ideas. In that sense, I feel I'm doing something new. These works follow a different process from the group pieces, which are decided collectively in meetings and intended to distribute income.

Banks: The exhibition title is suggestive of movement and rhythm, as well as collective creation. How do you view the role of imagination in sustaining (and possibly reinventing) Indigenous artistic practices today?

Alarcón: The choreographies of our imaginations move to the rhythm of the weaving's motion. They are songs that we Wichi women know how to sing—whispers passed down from our ancestors to us, the guardians of the forest. This is our knowledge; the gestures we make as we weave are part of that knowledge.

I believe that to understand these choreographies, one simply has to immerse themselves in the weavings—pause, observe them closely, open oneself to them. These whispers, these songs, embrace each other so that we can hold one another up.

Today, it's not just about calling what we do "art." It is something more than that. It is the future, and the time for it has arrived.



Claudia Alarcón, *Los pétalos y las espinas de la memoria* (The petals and thorns of memory), 2025, hand-spun chaguar fiber, woven in antique stitch
LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

Banks: Your work has recently moved from the Gran Chaco to major global platforms like the 2024 Venice Biennale, now London and beyond. I'm interested to know how you navigate keeping a sense of integrity and cultural specificity as the practice enters international institutions and therefore global conversations?

Alarcón: Margarita Ramírez, a master weaver from the Diaguita people in northern Argentina, once said before a large audience at an art museum: "Forgive my delay, it was very hard for me to get here." I like to use that expression to begin telling how, as Indigenous women, we lost our way time and again, but even so, we arrived at the places we needed to reach. There were so many hardships, yet we remain standing. Strengthened by the journey, we carry with us many joys and much laughter. What we bring has been made with deep love.

Banks: What has it meant to see your collective work displayed, viewed and discussed on an international stage, and enter the global art conversation?

Alarcón: I believe the most important part of this story is that my Wichí community—and when I say Wichí, I mean people, because that is what the word itself means—are now known around the world through art. This is opening up many possibilities; it allows us to dream of changing the things we need in order to live better. I am very proud to be walking these new paths and to carry with me such a vast and powerful memory.



Claudia Alarcón & Silät "Choreography of the Imagination" at Cecilia Brunson Projects
LUCY DAWKINS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CECILIA BRUNSON PROJECTS

"Choreography of the Imagination" is at Cecilia Brunson Projects until July 25, 2025. The exhibition coincides with Claudia Alarcón & Silät's first institutional solo show, "Tayhin", at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, UK, which continues until September 14, 2025. The collective will head to Guggenheim Bilbao in December 2025, and MASP in March 2026.

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