

COLECTIVO AYLLU: BRINGING HISTORICAL VIOLENCE BACK TO LIFE

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In the Andean region, particularly among the Quechua and Aymara peoples, the ayllu is an ancestral system for organising life. It includes various families connected by a common origin and territory. Among the members of an ayllu there are different ties of kinship, not all biological. Much like a fabric, an ayllu interweaves different emotional, social, and economic relationships, all linked to the conscious exploitation of the land. This sophisticated model has been functioning for centuries. It has survived in the highland areas and valleys that surround the Andes Mountain Range, different imperial processes having failed to crush a culture based on fairness, solidarity, and social peace - a form of life impossible in the modern western world.

However, since the second half of the twentieth century, ayllu-like communities have begun forming in the context of Europe and the United States due to migration or exile from Latin America and the Caribbean. Authors like Michel S. Laguerre speak of “diasporic enclaves”, which they understand as cultural collectives that share a common origin of displacement, whose territory is always a border between various places. José Esteban Muñoz, in dialogue with the *Black Studies* emerging in universities of the US in the late seventies, proposes the idea of a “common brown” to refer to a “being in common”, a communality that flourishes in/from the displacement from the South to the North. It is “their capacity to suffer and struggle together”, but also to prosper in the midst of the hostility and uncertainty of uprootedness that determines their collectively unbeatable nature. “Communality is never placid. Life in communality is and must be turbulent, not only because of the distinct restrictions that it seeks to crush, but also because the dissent implicit in communality is of vital importance for the rise of its own promise of insurrection”, asserts Muñoz. *We were never meant to survive*, writes Audre

Lorde; “No esperaban que sobrevivieramos” is the title of one of the works presented in the exhibition.

The context from which Colectivo Ayllu emerges is Madrid at the beginning of the twenty-first century; a city in which, by 2024, a million Latin Americans and Caribbeans have settled. They self-define as “a collaborative artistic-political research and action group of migrant, racialised, gender and sexual dissidents from former Spanish colonies”. The collective is made up of Álex Aguirre Sánchez (Quito, Ecuador), Kimy Rojas Miranda (Guayaquil, Ecuador), Lucrecia Masson Córdoba (Ombucta, Argentina), Iki Yos Piña Narváez (Caracas, Venezuela) and Francisco Godoy Vega (Santiago, Chile). It is unsurprising that they have chosen a term so laden with memory, affectivity and political force to name themselves, even in their geographical displacement so far from the Andes. The ensemble of artistic practices that they have been developing since their formation as a collective in 2017 can only be understood as this weave of Andean ayllu, in which diverse links intertwine from a profound conscience of communality, as Gladys Tzul Tzul also points out in relation to indigenous government systems in Chuimeq’ena.

Ayllu operates from a commitment to a critique of colonialism, whiteness and cis-heteronormativity. It inhabits a boundary in which artistic production, writing, and the mediation and generation of spaces of learning converge. P.O.P.S. (Programme Oriented to Subordinate Practices), that they organised at the Centre of Artistic Residences at Matadero Madrid in 2019, brought together a broad range of people. The majority were young first or second-generation migrants, who found in the activities organised by the collective a safe space to begin developing *sudaka*, Caribbean, Indian, black, and brown identities in the capital of the Spanish kingdom. The identities constructed in the diaspora strived to disrupt an essentially white cultural scene in denial of its own racial diversity. Ballroom sessions, *don’t hit la negrx* parties, conferences with great intellectuals from Abya Yala, gay pride marches, workshops, and meals, are among the dozens of encounters that have moulded an artistic practice that is truly communal.

After an intense journey that has led them to exhibit their work in museums and art centres in Paris, Lisbon, Vienna, Melbourne, La Paz, Quito, and Barcelona, the show at Formato Comodo Gallery marks their second individual exhibition in Madrid. The first, *Devuélvannos el oro*, took place at Matadero in 2018. Alongside this series of exhibitions, they have developed specific projects for major international events like the Sydney Biennial, Australia (2018), the Kochi-Mizuris Biennial, India (2022) and the Sao Paulo Biennial, Brazil (2023). *Proteja nuestros secretos* is an ambiguous invitation. It reveals, yet simultaneously conceals, that which it brings together. It positions us to inhabit an unknown space: that of *its secrets*. At the intersection of disobedience, pain, resistance, and healing, Colectivo Ayllu achieve with this show the maturation of an artistic practice that, according to Vialcary Crisóstomo, is itself a project of “liberation for”.

The exhibition includes five works produced in recent years. *Existió un tiempo anterior a que tuviéramos cuerpo* (2023) and the series of lithographs *Perrear el dolor* (2020) evoke discomfort in the face of evidence of colonial violence that continues to this day. The images allude to the bestialisation of non-white bodies and their total dehumanisation. The installation *Protección Nefanda* (2024) -presented here in an exhibition for the first time- and the video *Nuestro juramento* (2022), use plastic tools originating from an ancestral archive, a syncretic and popular memory that lives on in the heart of a whole community, wherever it is, wherever it goes. The votive altar, the ritual, the offering, the soul of things, manifests in these paintings, in the lines of the drawings, the calligraphy of the embroidery, the knots of the *kipu*, the performance of the dissident bodies. Divinity is the biggest of the secrets.

Finally, completing the exhibition is *No esperaban que sobreviviéramos II* (2023), an ensemble of wings-banners in the shape of a bird, butterfly, or other unclassifiable birds, with which Ayllu- and its partner collective Migrantes Transgresorxs- have reclaimed the presence of a block of racialised people at the Critical Pride demonstrations in Madrid. The origins of this series lie in the 2020 march, the year of COVID 19, when restrictions imposed due to the pandemic were particularly hard on dissident, trans,

migrant, sex-worker bodies. In the face of this oppression, it was again the collectivity that Ayllu upholds that invoked celebration as a form of resistance. From the heights, the proclamations and incantations of the pieces exhorted: *We are the dream of our ancestors*.

Undoubtedly, the chapter on art, dissidence, and migration in the Spanish context is still being written at this moment. However, we can portend that Colectivo Ayllu will take a leading place in this narrative. Meanwhile, the works in this exhibition disrupt with vehemence and vitality the dying linearity of western time. It is not inconsequential that this is happening in the city of Madrid. They have come here to settle the unpaid debts of history and they send a message to the future: the past is today a disputed territory. So join this ayllu because the road will be long.

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