

# Claudia Andujar



This exhibition presents the work of Brazilian artist and activist Claudia Andujar. Andujar was born in Switzerland in 1931 and raised in Transylvania in a family of Jewish and Protestant heritage. A survivor of the Holocaust, Andujar arrived in Brazil in 1955, where she began a career as a photojournalist.

Andujar found in photography a new language to connect with people and her adopted country. Over time, she built a body of work that focused on vulnerable and marginalized communities. She always tried to put herself in the place of the other as a way to learn about them and about her own self. In 1971, at the age of 40, Andujar met the Yanomami, an Amerindian people living in the Amazon rainforest. The close relationship they developed in few years was expressed through her original photographic interpretation of the Yanomami culture.

During the 1970s, Brazil's military dictatorship launched an ambitious program to open up the Amazon and exploit its resources. The mass arrival of workers and gold miners to the region in the next years led to the breakdown of Yanomami communities and the spread of deadly diseases, with hundreds of deaths. In the 1980s, Andujar progressively moved away from her art to organize campaigns, protests, health programs, and travel the world with Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa to force Brazilian government to protect his people.

Including photographs, drawings, and documents, many of which are shown here for the first time, this is the first large scale retrospective of the life of Claudia Andujar and her five-decade commitment to the defense of the Yanomami people. It is also the story of how an artistic project evolved into direct political activism.

Today, a renewed invasion of gold miners, the arrival of Covid-19, and Brazilian government's failure to protect the indigenous populations and their environment are setting the stage for a new massacre. This show is also an urgent call to avoid repeating this history of death.

Thyago Nogueira, curator of the exhibition

Exhibition organized by Instituto Moreira Salles in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE, and supported by Hutukara Associação Yanomami and Instituto Socioambiental, Brazil. The exhibition will travel to The Barbican Centre (London) and Fotomuseum Winterthur (Switzerland).

Maloca near the Catholic mission at the Catrimani River, Roraima State, Brazil, 1976. Infrared film

© Claudia Andujar



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## The Lure of the Catrimani

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**1971-1977**

At the beginning of 1971, Claudia Andujar took her first pictures of the Yanomami, while working as a staff photographer for the Brazilian magazine *Realidade*. The special issue dedicated to the Amazon examined the impact of the military regime's economic program in the region. Frustrated by the fast pace of journalism and preferring to devote herself to a long-term project, Andujar secured a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation grant. At the end of that year, she first visited Yanomami territory in the Catrimani River basin, a more isolated region in northern Brazil. She stayed only four days, but between 1971 and 1977 Andujar traveled back to Catrimani several times, staying for extended periods. The Italian Catholic missionary Carlo Zacquini, who had lived in the region since 1965, introduced her to the Yanomami and their culture. Throughout those years, Andujar established close ties and developed a deeper understanding of the Yanomami people, alternating her photographic work with the community's daily activities. She also began to experiment with a variety of photographic techniques, applying Vaseline to the camera lens, adopting infrared film, and later re-photographing her own images with colored filters. Life in the forest gained a mysterious dreamlike atmosphere.

The young girl Susi Korihana thëri, Catrimani, Roraima State, Brazil, 1972-1974. Infrared film

© Claudia Andujar



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## The Intimacy of Home

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**1971-1977**

The Catholic mission in the Catrimani River region welcomed Claudia Andujar during her visits. From there, she traveled to different villages, photographing family routines in the large *yano*, the communal houses that sheltered dozens of families. In 1972, Andujar contracted malaria, which forced her to spend the following year in São Paulo. Back home, she taught photography courses, and studied new ways of photographing in low light until she was able to return to Catrimani. Her photographs, taken in the *yano*, present the Yanomami's everyday life with greater intimacy and seek to convey the complexity of the shamanic world they live within. Rays of light burst through the air. A young man reclines in a hammock, enveloped in smoke. A roof made of palm leaves glitters like a starry night sky. Ordinary scenes are represented in ways that transcend reality. Andujar strives to make an invisible world visible, as if photography could offer a metaphysical investigation of the Yanomami's world view. In those years, the Yanomami were not properly interested in Andujar's photography, and most of them didn't recognize themselves in her photos.

Inside a collective house near the Catrimani River. Catrimani, Roraima, Brazil, 1974

© Claudia Andujar



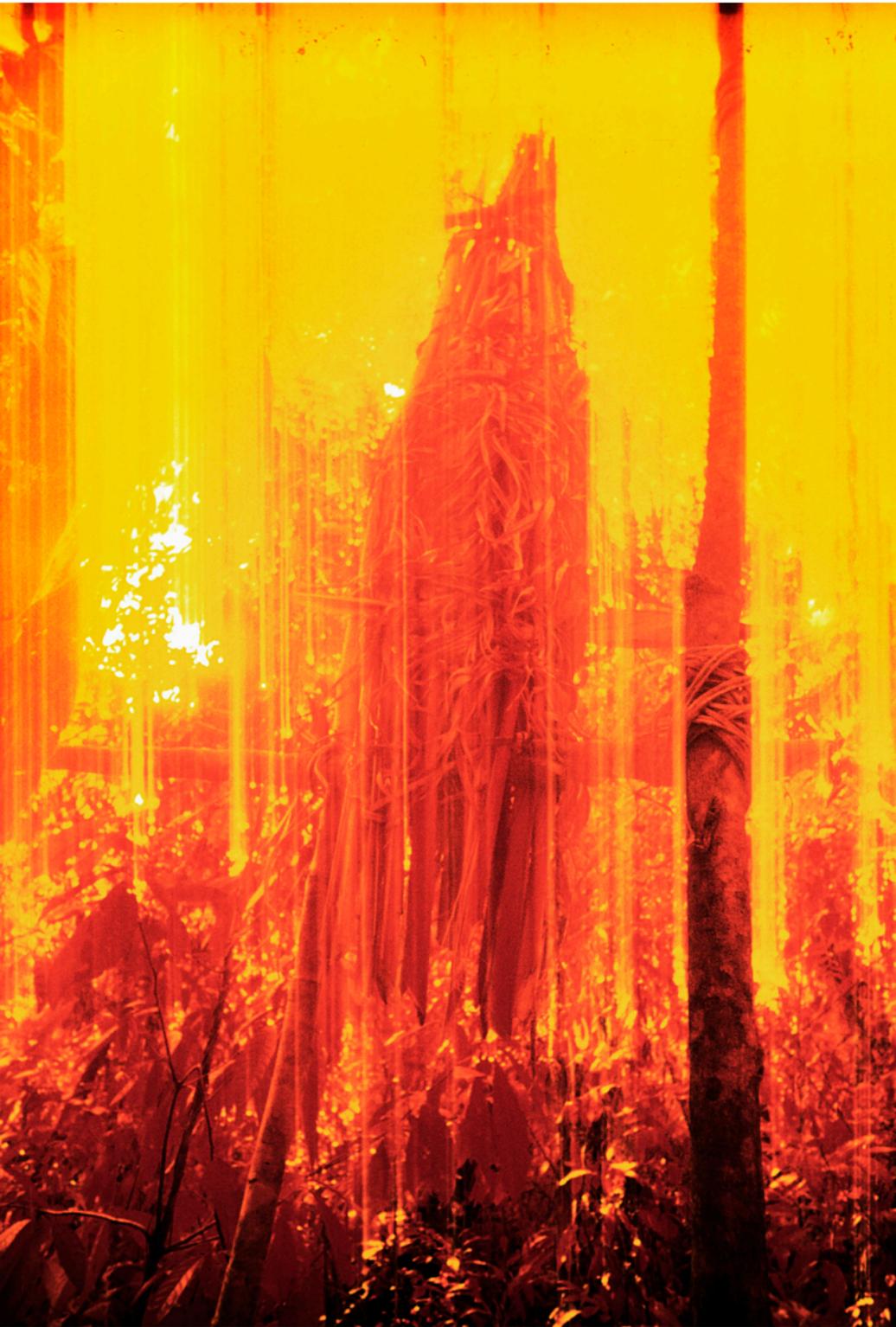
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## Ritual and Invention

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### 1972-1976

These impressive series of photographs portray the most important event in the Yanomami social life, the *reahu*, which is both an inter-community gathering and a funeral ritual. Ceremonial chants, dance, and dialogues are part of a feast with long and segmented ritual, which can last for days. At the end of the *reahu*, all of the men inhale a hallucinogenic powder called *yākoana*, to nurture the *xapiri* spirits that help them govern the communal life. Andujar used different photographic techniques to represent the different moments of the ceremonies. She superimposes several scenes in the same frame, uses low shutter speed to blur moving elements, or flashes and oil lamps to create shimmering streaks of light. Her photos seek to capture the movement, sound, and vision of the shamanic experience, as if they could render it visible. Her artistic interpretation endeavors to expand the outsider's perception of the ritual. In recent years, several young Yanomami have begun using photography and video to document their own culture. The first film of a *reahu* ritual by a Yanomami director (Morzaniel Iramari) is presented here.



Naki uxima and Marokoi Wapokohipi thëri dance and chant in the collective house during a *reahu* feast, Catrimani, Roraima State, Brazil, 1974

© Claudia Andujar

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Funerary cocoon, Catrimani, Roraima State, Brazil, 1976.  
Infrared film

© Claudia Andujar



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## Searching for an Identity

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**1972-1976**

In this sober series, Claudia Andujar portrayed her friends, children and adults, using the natural light penetrating their collective homes. She tightly frames her images, employing a dramatic chiaroscuro that draws attention to each person's individuality. For each portrait session, Andujar used an entire roll of film, working slowly to sensitively represent the best of her subjects. The Yanomami had welcomed Andujar into their community. Seen as a family album, these portraits celebrate their friendship with respect and intimacy, strengthening emotional bonds between photographer and sitters.

The Yanomami are reluctant to be photographed because they fear that if after death a trace of them remains in the world of the living, their spirit will not reach the "back of the sky" and their loved-ones will die from grief. When someone dies, all of their belongings, including images, must be destroyed. Andujar's body of work survives as an ethical commitment: the Yanomami understand these images are important to make themselves and their plight known to the outside world.

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# The Drawing Project

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**1974-1977**

Understanding that her photography couldn't grasp all the complexities of the Yanomami culture and experience, Claudia Andujar and the Italian missionary Carlo Zacchini initiated a drawing project with the Yanomami in 1974. They supplied the inhabitants of the Catrimani River region with paper and felt-tip pens and invited them to represent their daily life, myths, and rituals. Andujar received a grant from the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) in 1976 to expand the project. The money was used to drive kilos of art supplies from São Paulo to Roraima in a black Volkswagen Beetle, which the Yanomami nicknamed "Watupari" (Vulture spirit). After months of work, Yanomami artists such as Taniki, Vital, Orlando, and Hiko produced over one hundred drawings with a radically original visual perception. Multiple scenes unfold on a single sheet or the one story develops over several sheets. Characters from the past often merge with those of the present, and the same subject can be represented in one drawing from different perspectives. The scenes not only depict daily life, rituals, and shamanic visions, but also narrate the frustrations shamans face when failing to stop epidemics brought in by outsiders.



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## From Art to Activism

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### **1978 – to today**

The second part of the exhibition explores how Claudia Andujar's artistic practice gave way to her activism, when the sudden contact with Western society led to the decimation of the Yanomami people. In the 1970s, the Brazilian dictatorship's development program for the Amazon region aimed to open up the "empty green continent" to logging, ranching, mining, and other industries. Beginning in 1973, hundreds of migrants flocked to the Catrimani region to work on the construction of the Perimetral Norte, a highway that would cross the Amazon from east to west. The situation deteriorated in the 1980s, when an estimated 40,000 gold miners encroached upon the Yanomami lands. This mass migration and unbridled development brought disease, conflict, and social disruption, leading to thousands of deaths and environmental degradation. Claudia Andujar's expulsion from the territory in 1977 for alleged national security reasons was a turning point. Her artistic investigation, directed to an audience outside of the region, loomed over the urgency of direct political action. Forced by the government to stay in São Paulo for almost a year, Andujar became involved in a growing movement to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. In 1978, with the Italian missionary Carlo Zacchini and anthropologist Bruce Albert, she founded the Comissão Pró-Yanomami (CCPY). For the next 14 years, Andujar, the CCPY, and the Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa headed a relentless struggle to call attention to the mass killing of Yano-mami people and fight for the demarcation of their territory.

Yanomami in the construction work of the North Perimeter Highway, Roraima State, Brazil, 1975

© Claudia Andujar



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## Health Programs

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### 1980-1987

During the 1980s, more than 15% of the Yanomami population died from malaria and infectious diseases brought in by construction workers and gold miners. In 1980, the CCPY launched an urgent vaccination campaign as part of a larger healthcare project to immunize the Yanomami against fatal infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, measles, and influenza. During the campaign, Claudia Andujar and two doctors traveled throughout Yanomami territory to areas that are very difficult to access. To speed up identification, the doctors developed a system in which each individual was photographed with a tag around their neck indicating their medical record number, used to track the vaccines and treatments administered over the years. At that time, most Yanomami did not have Portuguese names or documents that could be used as identification. Their names changed during the course of their lives and could not be pronounced in their presence or in front of their relatives.

These portraits reveal the diversity of the communities and their proximity to Western society. In 2009, Andujar revisited these portraits in the series *Marked*, drawing parallels with her own experience: “I first came across those branded for death when I was 13. My father, his family, and my school friends had worn the yellow Star of David sewn onto their clothing. Nearly forty years later, we hung a numbered tag around the neck of each Yanomami ‘vaccinated,’ this time in an attempt to save them. It isn’t about justifying the mark placed around their necks, but rather, about explaining that it refers to a sensitive and ambiguous area, one that may arouse discomfort and pain. It is this ambiguous feeling that led me, sixty years later, to transform what was initially a simple record of the Yanomami as ‘people’ appear—branded to live—into a work that questions this method of labeling people for whatever purpose.”

From the *Marked* series, Brazil, 1983. Double exposure

© Claudia Andujar

# *Genocídio do Yanomami: morte do Brasil*

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**1989/2018**

In 1989, Brazil's government maneuvered the division of Yanomami territory into 19 separate micro-reserves, in complete disregard for the Yanomami's way of life. It aimed to dispossess them of their land in order to encourage agricultural colonization and mining extraction. Use of a vast and contiguous territory is imperative to the survival of the Yanomami, who move frequently to ensure the renewal of the forest's natural resources. Indigenous leaders and NGOs strongly opposed the government's policy, because it would have rapidly led to the decimation of the Yanomami.

To protest against the "archipelago" demarcation, the exhibition *Genocídio do Yanomami: morte do Brasil* [Genocide of the Yanomami: Death of Brazil] was organized in São Paulo, with an audiovisual installation created by Andujar, who re-photographed more than 300 images from her archive with a goldish filter. Recreated for this exhibition, the installation tells the story of a world progressively devastated by Western "development." The moving score composed by Marlui Miranda blends Yanomami chants and dialogues with instrumental music from the United States, Spain, and Japan. In 1992, after national and inter-national pressure, a presidential decree finally recognized a vast, contiguous territory for the Yanomami.

Dedicated full-time to activism, since the mid-1980s Andujar has progressively stopped taking photographs. In her archive, she found a new energy to maintain the visibility of the Yanomami people on the political scene and mobilize opinion worldwide against violations of their rights.

## **Davi Kopenawa**

“Claudia Andujar came to Brazil, passed through São Paulo, then Brasília, then Boa Vista, and then to the Yanomami lands. She arrived at the Catrimani mission. She was thinking about her project, what she was going to do, what she was going to plant. The way one would plant a banana tree, the way one would plant a cashew tree. She wore the clothes of the Indian, to make friends. She is not Yanomami, but she is a true friend. She took photographs of childbirth, of women, of children. Then she taught me to fight, to defend our people, land, language, customs, festivals, dances, chants, and shamanism. She explained things to me like my own mother would. I did not know how to fight against politicians, against the nonindigenous people. It was good that she gave me the bow and arrow, not for killing Whites but for speaking in defense of the Yanomami people. It is very important for all of you to see the work she did. There are many photos of Yanomami who have already died but these photos are important for you to get to know and respect my people. Those who do not know the Yanomami will know them through these images. My people are in them. You have never visit them, but their images are here. It is important to me and to you, your sons and daughters, young adults, children to learn to see and respect my Yanomami people of Brazil who have lived in this land for many years.”