

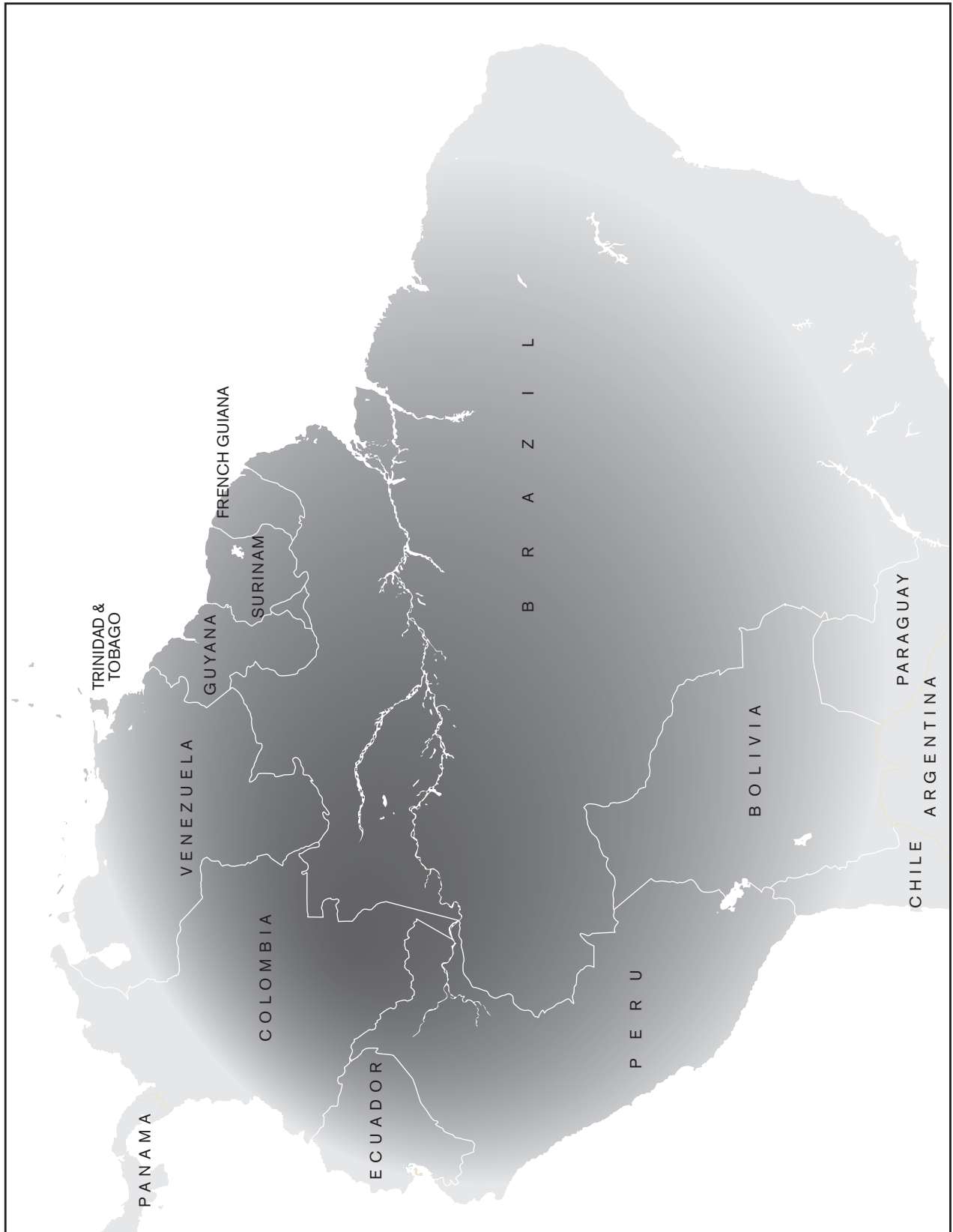
# Large print information



Please do not remove  
from this display

## Relating to animals





Map showing the current division of nation states in Amazonia.

Large panel in centre of display:

# **Relating to animals**

## **Art of action**

**Amazonia spans nine countries in South America and is made up of tropical rainforests and savannas. This display presents aspects of just a few of the region's societies.**

For many Amazonian communities, animals and people are fundamentally interconnected with their environment. This relationship is reflected in microcosms, such as the veins in leaves, and in macrocosms, such as the constellations of the stars. People maintain wellbeing in this living network by respecting the sovereignty of its constituent parts.

This display arises from work by the Museum's Santo Domingo Centre, which builds relationships with heritage-related projects in Latin America and challenges the way the region is commonly represented and studied.



Map created by Larissa Duarte, Josival Azevedo Rezende and Durvalino Fernandes in 2020. It shows the voyage of the ancestral anaconda in the Upper Rio Negro.

- |   |                 |    |              |
|---|-----------------|----|--------------|
| 1 | Amoñaka wi'i    | 8  | Barako wi'i  |
| 2 | Miriã porã wi'i | 9  | Temeda wi'i  |
| 3 | Bahsaka wi'i    | 10 | Abada wi'i   |
| 4 | Mihsipe wi'i    | 11 | Bayoroa wi'i |
| 5 | Yuhkuduka wi'i  | 12 | Ori wi'i     |
| 6 | Numiã wi'i      | 13 | Uhso wi'i    |
| 7 | Bahsa busa wi'i | 14 | Ipanumé      |

Lower panel to the left:

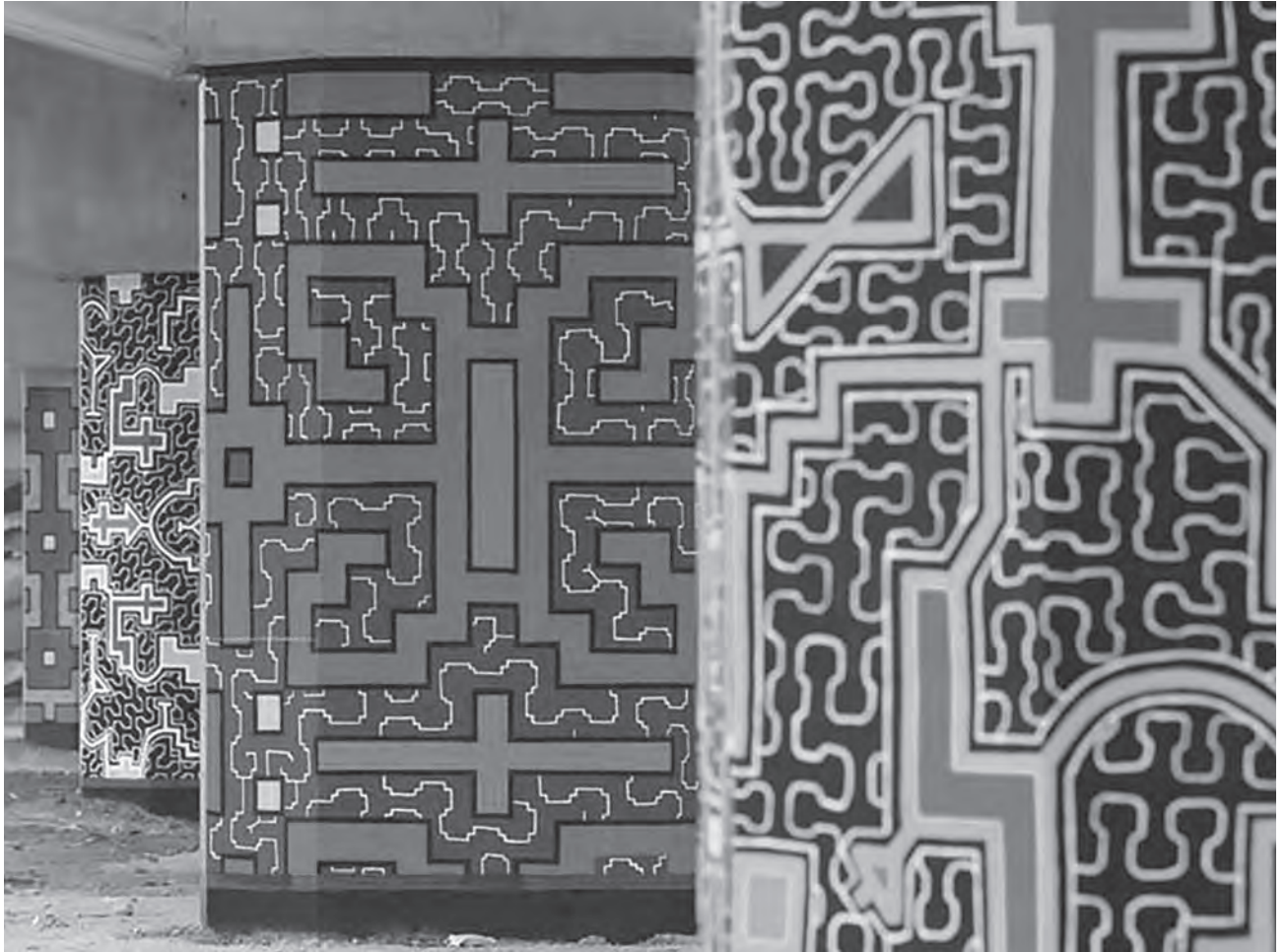
**Relating to animals**

# **Transformation**

**The contemporary and traditional artworks shown here come from across Amazonia. They reveal different ideas about the world and ways of living with the environment that have endured colonisation. These concepts are communicated today through a wide range of art forms.**

Indigenous art has traditionally been associated with local craft and folklore, but many Amazonian artists also participate in global circles. In this way, the Indigenous knowledge expressed in their art reaches beyond local communities to the artists' international audiences.





Kené designs painted on the concrete supports in the Lima metro bring ancestral knowledge to the urban environment. The murals are by a Shipibo-Konibo art collective directed by Olinda Silvano, Silvia Ricopa and Wilma Maynas.

Photo © The artists

**Displayed here**

***Huwe Moshi* ('Transformation Snake')**

**by Sheroanawe Hakihiwe, 2018**

Yanomami artist, Sheroanawe Hakihiwe, uses abstract horizontal and diagonal lines to represent the poisonous coral snake with its black, white and red stripes.

Characters from Yanomami mythical stories have the power to transform. They can change indiscriminately from animal to human and human to animal. In this work, Hakihiwe paints the snake using straight and diagonal lines, transforming its curved and fluid body into an abstract geometric image.

Acrylic on sugar paper  
Sheroana, Venezuela

2019,2016.1



## **Living design**

The design on these pots, known as kené, represents and embodies a primordial anaconda. The anaconda is the life-force behind the waters, trees and animals that make up the Ucayali river system, the ancestral home of Shipibo-Konibo people. If this power were to die, all life in the forest would die with it. Only women produce kené patterns. They dream about the designs and then bring them to life in artworks, which they share beyond their community through, for example, the street murals shown here.

1910s

Unknown artists

Pottery

Peru

1921,0507.6; 1936,0504.2; 8844; 8853

## **Cubeo barkcloth costumes** (above right)

Costumes such as these were worn by Cubeo people from the Tukano region for the **onye**, or 'weeping' dance. After the death of a community member, these masks were worn to disguise the dancers as animals and insects, or eggs and larvae. The ceremony marks the transition between the worlds of the living and the dead, as well as the importance of rebirth and regeneration over time. These dances are no longer practised anywhere in Amazonia.

1960s and 1910s

Bark, palm fibre

Unknown Cubeo artists

Brazil

1964,03.19; 1920,0705.61

Lower panel in the centre:

**Relating to animals**

## **The power of feathers**

**Feathers can be used to enable people with special ritual and intellectual knowledge to transform into birds. These clothes might have been worn for ceremonies celebrating this transformation.**

According to traditional knowledge, there are many ways in which people can acquire the ability to move through space and time, and so heal and shape their community's experience of the world. One way of doing this is to transform into a bird and transition between spatial dimensions. This usually involves dream states and powerful plants.



Indigenous ceremonial house (**maloca**) in the Upper Rio Negro, Brazil. Transformation and healing ceremonies often take place in **malocas**.

Photo © Aloisio Cabalzar

## Displayed here

### Feather garments

These feather capes and aprons may have been worn for transformation ceremonies.

#### 1 **Apron**

1920s

Unknown artist

Feathers, beetle tissue

Peru

1933,0713.147

#### 2 **Apron**

1960s

Unknown artist

Feathers, bark, bird tissue

Jivaro, Ecuador

1965,03.8

### **3 Back ornament**

1960s

Unknown artist

Feathers, seeds, beetle tissue, bird tissue

Jivaro, Ecuador

1965,03.7

### **4 Headdress**

1860s

Unknown artist

Feathers, plant fibres

Brazil

1046

## **Feather hammock** (above left)

Europeans settled in many parts of Amazonia from the 1570s onwards. An increase in demand for feather-work led Amazonian people to invent new techniques and styles of production to cater for foreign tastes. For example, the natural colour of the feathers was modified and the design began to incorporate European style floral motifs and coats of arms. This hammock was made specifically for a foreign collector.

1910s

Unknown artist

Plant fibres, feathers

Iquitos, Peru

1920,0705.69



Lower panel to the right:

**Relating to animals**

## **A story of fish-people**

**According to the oral histories of the Tukano people from northern Amazonia, humans originated with a journey on the serpent-canoe of transformation. These narratives describe worlds in which people and animals can transform into each other, and where time can alter dramatically.**

These watercolours by Tukano Desana artist, Feliciano Lana, depict an origin story. Unlike most stories, Lana's narrative does not take place at one particular time – the events happen in both the present and the past. This temporal disorder is echoed in the story, as time is experienced in radically different ways in the two worlds Lana describes.



Desana artist, Feliciano Lana, holding one of his watercolours, Upper Rio Negro, Brazil.

Photo © Aloisio Cabalzar

## Displayed here

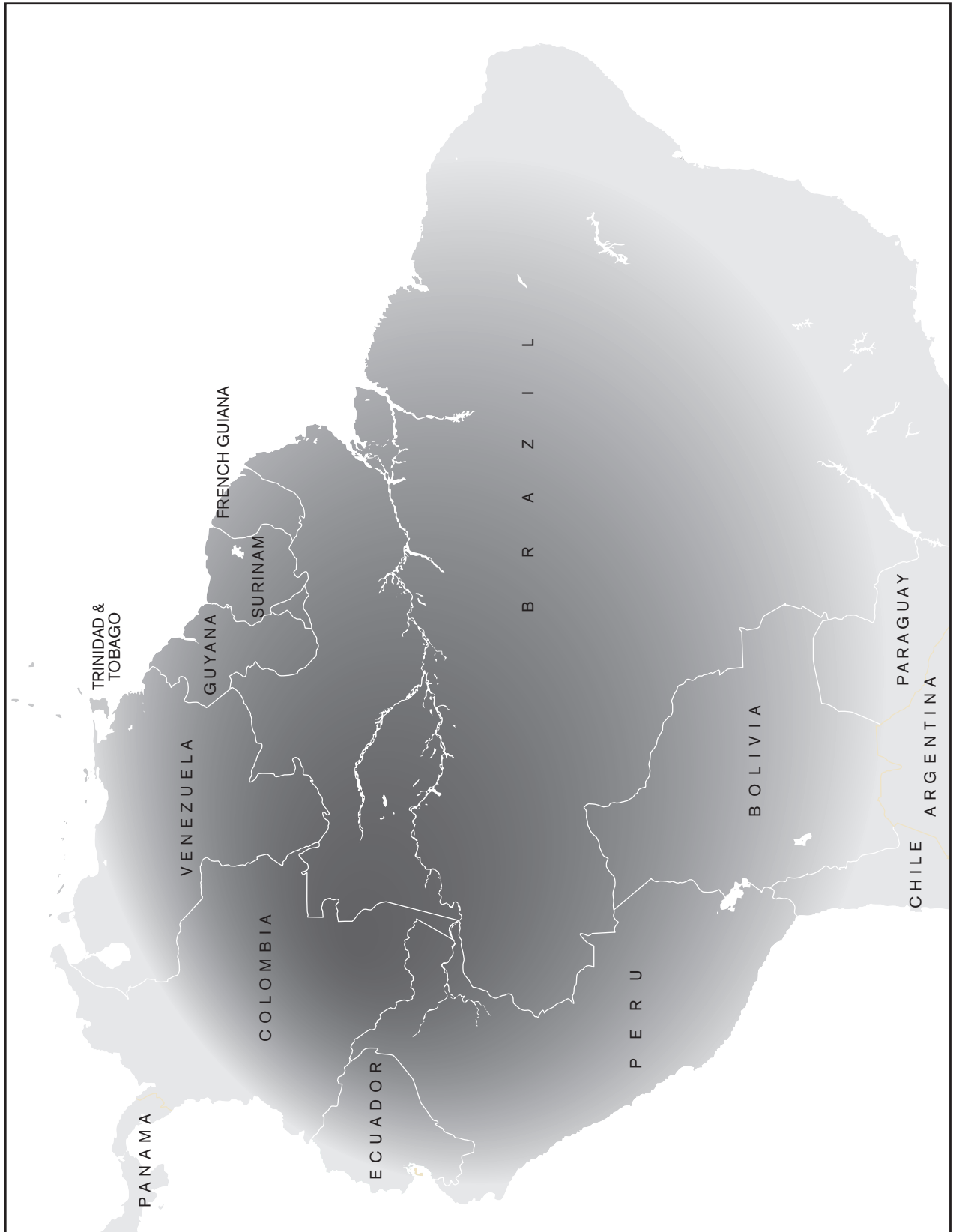
These captions, translated from Feliciano Lana's own words, accompany reproductions of his original watercolours.

- 1** In ancient times, people who entered the mouth of the Rio Negro could disappear. One day, a fisherman was trying to catch a turtle with his line, but a pod of dolphins surrounded him. 'Pum!', he shot a dolphin with his rifle. The other dolphins disappeared and he was left to fish in peace.
- 2** Suddenly police canoes approached. 'We arrest you for killing the postman!', they said. Confused, the fisherman was taken to shore.
- 3** Had he shot a dolphin or the postman? He knew about the enchanted city of Boiauaçu Bay, where animals can become people, and now he was being taken to the hospital to confirm whether he had shot a man.

- 4 At the hospital: 'I am dying', said the postman. The fisherman thought, 'It's a dolphin. They are people!', and the policeman took him to the station.
- 5 He was locked in a dark room with a giant fish and ordered to climb on top of it. Then many **tucuxis** (dwarves) came in and told him to escape.
- 6 A **tucuxi** came back and told him he was free and that he should go down to the riverbank.
- 7 There he met a woman. She asked him to fetch water in a pot, but he could only see a basket full of holes. She told him not to get the water from the riverbank but further down near a stick, where the water was cleaner.
- 8 When he got there, the stick was actually a big snake, but he was the only one who could see it. He was afraid and tried to collect water away from the snake. When he returned empty handed, the woman sent him back. This time, he climbed onto the snake and was able to collect water.

- 9** On his way back, he ran into the **tucuxis**. They urged him to leave the basket and go, because the police were looking for him. They told him he would find canoes at the end of the road.
- 10** But the canoes were alligators. He remembered that the woven basket was actually a pot and the sticks were actually snakes, so maybe the alligators were really canoes. He tried to climb on one.
- 11** The alligator took him out to where his boat was. He was back home in Lake Boiauaçu.
- 12** When he got there, his canoe was rotten and it felt like much more than one night had passed. His children were older. He had been gone two years, not two days.





Map showing the current division of nation states in Amazonia.



Large panel in centre of display  
on other side of case:

# **Relating to animals**

## Displacement

**Amazonia spans nine countries in South America and is made up of tropical rainforests and savannas. This display presents aspects of just a few of the region's societies.**

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Many of the objects displayed here were collected in the rubber boom of the early 1900s, during which thousands of Indigenous people died and many were displaced, disturbing their ancestral relationships.



Photograph taken in Western Amazonia documenting the displacement of peoples caused by the rubber boom.

Photo © Trustees of the British Museum

Lower panel to the left:

**Relating to animals**

## **Woven knowledge**

**According to Murui-Muina elders Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño and Alicia Sánchez, baskets symbolise the universe containing and connecting everything within it.**

Baskets not only demonstrate the weaving ability of the women who make them, they also represent the role of women in preserving ancestral culture. Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño and Alicia Sánchez see tight and intricate weaving as evidence of wisdom, while looser and simpler work implies the loss of traditional knowledge. The ability to produce some of the patterns in these baskets has been lost as a result of the destruction caused by the rubber boom.



Murui-Muina elder Alicia Sánchez holding one of the baskets from Eugène Robuchon's collection during her visit to the British Museum in 2019. French explorer Robuchon collected many objects during the rubber boom in the early 1900s.

Photo © SDCELAR

## Displayed here

### Baskets

The different techniques and patterns used to make these baskets have underlying meanings connected to traditions that have been almost completely forgotten. Today, baskets of this size are used to collect coca leaves and carry them to ceremonial houses, where they are dried out and prepared for consumption. Larger baskets are used to transport cassava roots and other large tubers, as well as hunted animals.

Early 1900s

Unknown Murui-Muina artists

Plant fibres

Colombia / Peru

1905,0216.105; 1905,0216.106;

1905,0216.107; 1905,0216.108;

1905,0216.109; 1905,0216.110;

1905,0216.111; 1928,0602.9

Lower panel in the centre:

**Relating to animals**

## **Healing objects**

**‘I saw the things made by my elders and was healed’.**

**Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño**

During their visit to the British Museum, Murui-Muina elders Alicia Sánchez and Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño chewed coca leaves and tobacco while examining the objects on display here. These stimulants are particularly useful during meaningful events and conversations. They help sharpen the senses and calm the mind, and can also be used for healing purposes.





Indigo bunting (***Passerina cyanea***). The feathers of this bird were used to make Murui-Muina headpieces in the early 1900s.

Photo © pixabay.com



## Displayed here

### Rattle staffs

The hollow tips at the end of these ceremonial spears contain small stones that rattle when the spear is shaken. At funerals, people would shake the spears to summon animal and human ancestors, asking the ancestors to help the deceased reach the next world. Alicia Sánchez and Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño, Murui-Muina elders, studied the stones left inside these rattles. They consider the stones to have come from the bodies of those who have the ability to communicate with spiritual worlds, and that this is how the spears became infused with the same power.

Early 1900s

Unknown Murui-Muina (witoto) artists

Wood, plant fibres

Colombia / Peru

1914,0416.139; 1921,0507.28; 1925,0704.23s

## Tobacco holders

Seed containers such as these hold a tobacco paste called **ambil**. It is made by boiling tobacco leaves for hours until they form a thick substance. The paste, which can be extracted using a finger or a stick, is chewed slowly in small quantities. These intricately carved seeds are no longer used by Murui-Muina and Bora people, who now carry their **ambil** in plastic containers.

Early 1900s

Unknown Murui-Muina artists

Wood, nut bark, plant fibres

Colombia / Peru

1914,0416.34; 1905,0216.101

## **Coca leaf crown**

The turquoise bird feathers that decorate this crown represent both the origin of the universe and the colour of powdered coca leaves. Coca leaves are left to dry until they form a green powder that can be used to mediate encounters between people, animals and other worlds.

This type of crown would have been worn by leaders and their sons during ceremonies. The rubber-boom genocide destroyed many Indigenous practices, and the details of the ceremonies and the ancestral knowledge that accompanied them have largely disappeared. Murui-Muina elders, Alicia Sánchez and Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño, remember their elders discussing these rituals.

Early 1900s

Cane, feathers, plant fibres

Unknown Murui-Muina artist

Colombia / Peru

1905,0216.9

Lower panel to the right:

**Relating to animals**

**Object in focus:**

**Dolphin tooth necklace**

**Tooth necklaces contain the powers of the animals from which they were taken. These examples were examined by visiting elders, Alicia Sánchez and Oscar Román Jitdutjaaño. They identified the dolphin tooth necklace as still holding such powers.**

According to the elders, river dolphins are shapeshifters who can disguise themselves as people and use other river creatures as their clothing. For example, an eel becomes a belt, fish are made into shoes and a crab turns into a watch. Thus disguised, the dolphins appear as white people to seduce or rape their victims. Well-dressed and wealthy, they are associated with the greed of foreigners in Amazonia, as well as the diseases introduced during the rubber boom in the early 1900s.



Dolphins live in large rivers, such as the Amazon and the Putumayo, far from the smaller tributaries where Murui-Muina people live. But the displacement of communities caused by the rubber boom enabled the stories associated with the power of dolphins to reach Murui-Muina people.

Photo © Francisco Javier Aceituno Bocanegra

## Displayed here

### Dolphin tooth necklace

1920s

Amazon river dolphin (**Inia geoffrensis**),

plant fibres

Unknown Murui-Muina artist

Colombia

1925,0704.9

### Jaguar, monkey, capybara and tapir tooth necklaces

Early 1900s

Animal teeth, plant fibres, seeds

Unknown Murui-Muina artists

Colombia / Peru

1914,0416.4; 1925,0704.12; 1914,0416.16;  
1925,0704.8; 1905,0216.81; 1914,0416.11;  
1914,0416.20; 1914,0416.3; 1914,0416.13;  
1914,0416.15; 1914,0416.6

**Shitikari ('Starscape') (above)**  
**by Sheroanawe Hakihiwe, 2019**

'The sky is big and the stars are in order. At night, when there are clouds, only some stars can be seen through the open spaces left by the clouds. When there are no clouds, however, you can see all the stars. We do not have names for each and every one of the stars, we call all of them Shitikari'.

Yanomami artist Sheroanawe Hakihiwe

Monotype print  
Cotton, ink  
Pori Pori, Venezuela

2019 2016.1