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# Kuahí

The Indians of the Lower Oiapoque and their museum

*Lux Vidal*

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades we have witnessed a proliferation of museums, including indigenous museums, with an emphasis on regionalization and active participation of the collectivities in which they are inserted. This article involves the implementation of the Museum of the Indigenous Peoples of Oiapoque, which was a request made by the four ethnic groups that inhabit the region – the Palikur, Galibi Kali'na, Karipuna and Galibi Marworno – to the governor of Amapá in 1998. Since then, projects and actions have been realized for the revival and strengthening of the cultural heritage of these peoples that inhabit the far north of Brazil, on the border with French Guyana. We present these actions, their consequences and the articulation among partnerships (with indigenous organizations, government agencies and NGOs), which led to the development and operation of a regional museological institution that is dedicated to housing, preserving and promoting the cultural archives of these peoples, and to training indigenous museology technicians, teachers and researchers. Finally we address the importance of the different collections about these indigenous peoples that have been formed over the past two decades and report of the exhibitions mounted at the Kuahí Museum in Oiapoque and at the Museum of the Indian in Rio de Janeiro, emphasizing the specificity of each.

**Keywords:** museum of the indigenous peoples of Oiapoque (Amapá); revival and strengthening of the cultural heritage; collections and exhibitions; tangible and intangible heritage.

## **Resumo**

Nas últimas décadas assistimos a uma proliferação de museus, inclusive museus indígenas, com ênfase na regionalização e participação ativa das coletividades onde estão inseridos. Este artigo trata da implantação do Museu dos

Povos Indígenas do Oiapoque, solicitado pelas quatro etnias que habitam a região – Palikur, Galibi Kali'na, Karipuna e Galibi Marworno – ao governador do Amapá em 1998. Desde então se desenvolveu nas aldeias indígenas projetos e ações de resgate e fortalecimento do Patrimônio Cultural desses povos que habitam o extremo norte do Brasil, na fronteira com a Guiana Francesa. Apresentamos essas ações e seus desdobramentos, com a articulação entre parcerias (organizações indígenas, órgãos governamentais, ONGs) para o funcionamento e desenvolvimento de uma instituição museológica regional, que pretende abrigar, preservar e divulgar o acervo cultural dessas populações, incentivando a capacitação de técnicos em museologia, professores e pesquisadores indígenas. Abordamos, por fim, a importância de diferentes coleções sobre esses povos indígenas, formadas ao longo das duas últimas décadas e um relato das exposições montadas no Museu Kuahí em Oiapoque e no Museu do índio, no Rio de Janeiro, ressaltando a especificidade de cada uma.

**Palavras-chave:** museu dos povos indígenas do Oiapoque (Amapá); valorização e fortalecimento cultural; coleções e exposições; patrimônio material e imaterial.

# Kuahí

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*Lux Vidal*



Photo: Francisco Paes

## Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s large ethnographic exhibitions were organized in Brazil and abroad, giving visibility to the material productions of indigenous peoples, especially the aesthetic of art made with feathers. In 1980 the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo presented an exhibit curated by artist Norberto Nicola, whose tapestry art was strongly influenced by indigenous featherwork. In 1992 a show called “Indians in Brazil: alterity, diversity and cultural dialog,” was part of a broad cultural program to celebrate 500 years of “discovery” of the Americas. The Bienal de Artes of 1983 had a display of indigenous art; and the Rediscovery Exhibit in 2000, mounted at Oca in Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo to commemorate Brazil’s 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary also highlighted a module called Indigenous Arts, to mention just a few. The large exhibition (1980-81) “Arte Plumária do Brasil” [Feather Art of Brazil] was presented at Itamaraty in Brasília, at the National Museum of Bogotá, at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, at the Anthropological Museum in Mexico City, in Madrid and at the Fundação João Miró, in Barcelona. At that time, this contributed to giving greater visibility to indigenous peoples from a new perspective. Nevertheless, these exhibitions belong to the past, given that, according to environmental preservation laws, it is expressly

prohibited to hunt birds and sell products with feathers, which indicates the importance of the oldest collections of these artifacts, which are now preserved in museums.

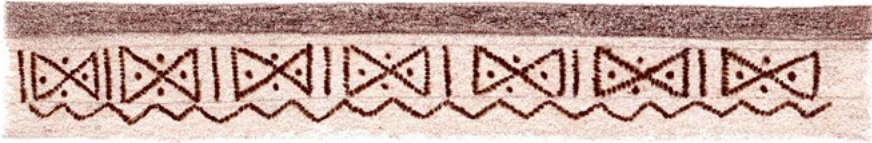
In academic circles, to the degree that studies about indigenous societies have advanced, the essential role of tangible and intangible expressions in the understanding of the dynamic and reproduction of Amerindian societies has become evident. These expressions include body painting, ornaments - especially feathered ones - masks, musical instruments, song and narratives.

This entire context encouraged many students to take interest in these issues among indigenous groups, resulting in courses, seminars, and in the 1992 publication of the book "Grafismo Indígena," [Indigenous Graphics] with various contributions, and which is now a reference in the issue. Over time, it became increasingly clear that the study of the objects and aesthetic manifestations of the indigenous peoples constitutes a very promising field of investigation.

Recently, many researchers, influenced by perspectivism and by the concept of agency, in addition to conducting long periods of field work reinforced the cosmological aspects of indigenous art which is intimately related to shamanistic activities. For the Amerindians, art originates in the world of the invisible beings and their tangible manifestations are not only representations, but living things, beings that have agency. When art is defined this way, it becomes a fundamental factor in understanding how the Amerindian societies present themselves and represent the world. The result of these ethnographic and analytical efforts has been the production and publication of excellent monographs, articles and videos, which have made an important contribution to the anthropology of art.

All of these productions, however, take place only in the urban world, essentially in the academy and in traditional museums, far from the local contexts of the indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, in the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of the struggles for recognition of their lands and constitutional rights, there was a significant increase in the participation of Indians on Brazil's national scene.

Today the indigenous peoples and their organizations include the category of culture in the preparation of their "life plans" or "sustainable development programs," along with topics such as healthcare, education, territorial and environmental management,.



Doc 2 Graphic pattern of the Kuahí fish. Photo: Esther Castro.

On the other hand, since the enactment of Brazil's Constitution of 1988, Indians have the right to a differentiated education through the teaching of indigenous language and culture. Since today, in the villages, most of the teachers hired by the state are Indians, there is an interest and even a need to promote reflections about how to organize and transmit a significant archive of traditional knowledge, which is specific to each people and produce pedagogical materials that can be used in indigenous schools and cultural events. In this context, the indigenous museums perform an essential role by configuring themselves as institutions, although as independent spaces that are more free, informal and interactive and dedicated to the development of innovative actions and activities, places for experimentation. The indigenous museums also promote a range of partnerships for the concretization of projects and a more just and participative insertion in Brazilian society.

### **The Kuahí Museum**

We have recently observed the proliferation of indigenous and regional museums throughout the world, a model that has been emphasized because it has specific characteristics, including active participation of the communities where they are inserted.

To better understand the specificity of the Kuahí Museum, it is important to offer some preliminary information about the region and the people that live there. First, the term Kuahí refers to a small fish found in the region and to the name of a graphic pattern that is commonly used in the decoration of a wide variety of artifacts (figure 1).

The indigenous peoples of the far north of Amapá, – the Karipuna, Palikur, Galibi Marworno and Galibi Kali'na – residents of the Uaçá River Basin and of the Lower Oiapoque River, are the result of various migrations and ancient and more recent fusions of different ethnicities, even non-Indians. They are bearers of heterogeneous cultural traditions, histories of contact and differentiated trajectories, as well as languages and religions.



Doc 3. Birds and heron in the flooded savannah. Photo: Fábio Maffei.

Over time these people have been able to coexist and construct a space for interlocution, particularly through their annual assemblies, which bring together the four ethnicities and their indigenous organizations. Despite their differences, a visible solidarity prevails among these people because they inhabit a single territory, they experience a common geopolitical situation, and maintain and reactivate relations of kinship and mutual assistance, as well as struggle together for land, healthcare, education, and infrastructure. They share a specific indigenous cosmology, which is Carib, Aruak, Tupi and also Christian, a distinctive factor that the Indians define as “our system.”

These people total a population of 7.000 Indians distributed in various villages and smaller localities on the indigenous lands of Uaçá, Galibi and Juminã, which have been demarcated and legally registered, configuring a large continuous area, which is cut on the west by federal highway BR-156 which links Macapá to Oiapoque.

Much of the indigenous population of the lower Oiapoque communicates in various languages; Portuguese and patois or *kheoul* (the regional *língua franca*), a native language of the Karipuna and Galibi Marworno; while the Palikur and Galibi Kali’na speak their respective languages in the villages. Some Indians also know how to speak French.



Doc 4. Photo: Lux Vidal.

The landscape typical of the region inhabited by the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque is a flooded savannah, bathed by three large rivers the Uaçá, the Urucauá and the Curipi, in addition to countless tributaries, igarapés and lakes. The Oiapoque River marks the border between Brazil and French Guyana. The western portion of the indigenous territory has tropical forest with rich vegetation with many palm trees and meets the Tumucumaque Mountains; to the east are the Cassiporé River, Cape Orange and the Atlantic Ocean. The villages and the plantations occupy different islands. It is a region with many birds.

This territory is primarily a living space. The Indians have a refined knowledge of this vast rich and diversified region, which is always present in their myths and narratives. This entire landscape, according to the Indians, is inhabited by human beings, animals and vegetation and also by beings “from the other world,” which is manifest by the intermediation of the *pajés* or shamans. This is a predominantly aquatic world, whose cosmology emphasizes invisible supernatural beings that inhabit “the center of the forest and the depth of the waters.” The ancient cartographers called the region the “pays sous l’eau”, *peí ába dji ló*, in patois.

The indigenous communities maintain very close contact with the city





Doc 5. Village on a small island along the Curipi river. Photo: Lux Vidal

of Oiapoque and even with Saint Georges, in French Guyana, where they sell their agricultural products and artifacts, usually in the street or on the river bank.

Today, many infrastructure works are being executed in the region: the paving of federal highway BR-156 (which cuts through the indigenous territory) and will involve the removal of eight villages along the highway; the construction by the federal electrical company Eletronorte of a transmission line along the highway and the construction of a bridge, which has been completed, over the Oiapoque River, between French Guyana and Brazil.

### **History of the Museum**

In 1997, after some indians traveled to Germany, France and Portugal accompanied by federal deputy Janete Capiberibe, indigenous leaders from the region proposed the creation of a museum in Oiapoque, at the center of the city, to give visibility to the indigenous culture and serve as a center of reference, memory, documentation and research for the Indians from the Lower Oiapoque. This proposal arose from the Indians' increasing desire to



Doc 6. Civic festival in the city of Oiapoque, in front of the Kuahí Museum. Photo: Marina Zacchi

participate, on equal grounds – even if in a differentiated manner – in regional and national life. Aware of their cultural and environmental wealth, of the possibilities for production and ethno-scientific, artisan and artistic promotion; and also aware of the possibilities for sustainable development and the urgent need for better school programs, the indigenous peoples of Oiapoque proposed the Kuahí Museum as a space that would encourage a vast range of activities, research and actions to benefit the indigenous communities and their initiatives as a whole.

The museum would also allow closer relations between the Indians and the population of the municipality of Oiapoque. The proximity with the indigenous villages, in turn, would insert the museum in its regional context facilitating the understanding of the collection, but remaining just far enough from the communities to allow a separation from daily life, leading the Indians to a more critical vision of themselves and their cultural heritage. In addition, it would allow the exchange with indigenous peoples and museums in Brazil and abroad, through agreements with institutions and universities.

Another objective of the museum would be to create alternative income

sources by means of planned sales of craft production. The museum would give visibility to the artifacts produced in the villages and above all, promote the knowledge of the master craftsmen and craftswomen and artists, and raise concerns about the sustainability of the raw materials used in their material productions.

Various Indians from the region have been to the Paraense Emilio Goeldi Museum in Belém and have seen photographs of the Magüta Museum of the Ticuna Indians on the Solimões River. These were the sources of inspiration for the preparation of the proposal for the construction of the Kuahí Museum.

The concrete proposal for the construction of the museum was presented by the indigenous leaders to the government of Amapá in 1998 and was formally included in the Sustainable Development Program of then Governor João Alberto Capiberibe.

Construction of the museum was initiated in 2000, and the Indians, with assistance from myself and Lucia H. van Velthem of the Paraense Emilio Goeldi Museum, presented the government a set of documents: a justification and objectives for the museum, by-laws, a list of equipment and related items. It was an innovative proposal because it was not a museum about Indians but by Indians.

As planned, the museum would be maintained by the Amapá state government and administered by the Indians themselves directly involved in all the activities. Courses and training workshops would be offered for the training of museology technicians to people selected by the indigenous communities. Effective support of a non-paternalistic nature for the indigenous communities and their cultural manifestations was expected from the government, understanding that the construction of the Indians' citizenship is based on their own values, dynamic and historic process.



Doc 7 Rear view of the Kuahí Museum. Photo: Lux Vidal.

## The implementation of the Museum

Although the Kuahí Museum was only inaugurated in 2007, its presence had been felt since 2001 with the realization of the first training course in museology for a group of 20 indigenous people who were chosen by the communities themselves based on the schooling and interests of each participant. These courses were given in Oiapoque and Belém, at the Paraense Emilio Goeldi Museum and at the Museum of Art. In Belém, they also visited the Museum of the State, the Museum of Sacred Art, art galleries and locations in the city of historic and cultural interest.

In parallel, two cultural projects undertaken in the villages were of significant importance for stimulating the cultural revival that these indigenous peoples had witnessed. They involved two projects: “Cultural Revival and Strengthening,” undertaken by the Indigenous People’s Association of Oiapoque (APIO) in partnership with the Demonstration Program for Indigenous Populations of the Ministry of the Environment (PDPI/MMA); and “Cultural Heritage Managers Training,” undertaken in conjunction with indigenous teachers who work in the villages along federal highway BR 156, conducted by the Indigenous Educational and Research Institute (Iepé), in partnership with the program Petrobras Cultural.

The Cultural Revival and Strengthening project (APIO/PDPI), undertaken



Doc 8: Training workshop at the Museum Goeldi in Belém. Photo: Francisco Paes.



Doc 9: Training workshop in the Parochial House in Oiapoque. Photo: Lux Vidal.



Doc 10: Elderly shaman giving instructions to a young craftsman carving a ritual bench.  
Photo: Lux Vidal.

with the Indians, sought to encourage the old craftsmen and women, in their own villages and places of traditional production, to transmit to the younger generations their knowledge, information and techniques related to a wide variety of material and immaterial artistic and craft manifestations. The goal was to guarantee the transmission of knowledge that was at risk of extinction, given that only a limited number of people still had this knowledge and most of them were quite old. This project considerably stimulated indigenous craft production in all the villages of the region.

According to Marina Zacchi who coordinated the project (Zacchi:2012), because of the way that it was conceived, the project would promote the transmission in the villages of knowledge that few people held, or that some held in a special manner. It was decided, however, to not use a workshop format. The project designated the detainer of knowledge as a master, giving him or her a distinctive status, suggested a small number of apprentices and supplied the needed material. It was up to the “master” to name the apprentices, and determine how, when and at what pace the transmission would be conducted. During the process, the anthropological coordination accompanied and registered the choices made.

The most interesting aspect of this experience was to observe the appropriation of the project in the villages, which was possible, actually, thanks

to the program's openness to the alterations suggested by the indigenous participants. Finally what was important was not if the cultural expressions would continue to be practiced or not. This necessarily is, and would continue to be, a choice made and remade by their producers, according to the meanings that the cultural expressions acquire in the course of history. The purpose was important to place the indigenous cultural expressions on the agenda to provoke a reflection on them.

Foreseeing the growing interest in the indigenous cultural expressions that resulted from the immaterial heritage policies instituted by Dec. 3551/2000 and promoted by its instruments, this project proposed preparing the Indians of the Oiapoque to assume the initiatives of promotion and diffusion of their cultural heritage and to give them a basis upon which they could chose the orientations for proposals made by possible partners.

In turn, the objective of the "Cultural Heritage Managers Training" – Projeto Iepé/Petrobras Cultural, was to prepare indigenous researchers to act as managers of their material and immaterial cultural heritage, by learning the procedures for selection, preservation, research, registration and internal and external promotion of their cultural goods. The villages located along federal highway BR-156 were chosen for the realization of this project due to their high vulnerability caused by the paving of the road that linked Macapá to Oiapoque and for which reason the villages would be removed. The project led to the appropriation on another level of the knowledge that these people held. It wound up stimulating reflections about the issue of ethnicity and others, such as the condition of indigenous women and the relationship between youths and elders. In each one of the villages, the formation of researchers acquired a format dictated by the local dynamic, although the dynamic of the project led the different ethnic groups of the Karipuna, Galibi Marworno and Palikur to dialog among each other.

These projects also stimulated initiatives and innovations by the Indians in the villages. A good example is the work with gourds, which are common artifacts in the daily rituals and religious contexts in the villages, and which serve many varied uses and which had not been previously considered as the object of an intervention project. But this wound up taking place, because of the initiative of craftswoman Edilene from Manga, a Karipuna village. What is interesting is that Edilene was not concerned with teaching the technique of engraving or dyeing gourds, which is known



Docs 11, 12, 13, 14: Gourds with figurative and traditional geometric engravings, representing local flora and fauna. Photos: Paulo Copolla (11-13) and Lux Vidal (14)

by many people. Edilene proposed researching the traditional markings, consulting the most elderly and registering the information obtained. Since she was a Galibi-Marworno who had lived for many years in a Karipuna village, she adopted as a procedure designing the gourds on paper and noting if the markings were related to both ethnic groups and if there were differences in the names attributed to them. In her research, she also registered the markings and information that she obtained in dreams about older relatives who had died, utilizing a traditional creative mechanism in which the aesthetic creation is linked to the invisible.

Another interesting aspect is that with the recent introduction of figurative motifs in the ornamentation, some men also began to engrave the gourds, an activity that in the past was exclusively for women. In the work by men, like that of Getúlio from the Kumarumã village, there are ornamental plants and animals and strong war scenes and shamanic confrontations. Also in the Kumarumã village, Manoel Azemiro Charles adopted his own way of working. Instead of engraving the motifs and later using *cumatê* paint, he engraves over a gourd that has been completely painted by his wife, so that



the design appears in white, standing out more than usual. The innovations introduced do not annul, but reposition the gender differences in the graphic expressions. These two examples show how the Indians, encouraged by these projects, began to take their own initiatives in relation to their cultural goods, conducting systematic surveys and introducing innovations.



Doc 16 – 19: Engravings applied by a man on gourds previously covered with kumatê paint by his wife. Photos: Paulo Copolla.

## From inauguration until today

The Kuahí Museum was inaugurated on April 19, 2007 – the National Day of the Indian – with the presence of indigenous people, state governor Antonio Waldez Góes da Silva and other government authorities, representatives of the Amapá State Secretariat of Culture– Secult/AP, as well as the local population.

The museum is a public not-for-profit entity, with indirect government management, linked to the organizational structure of the Amapá State Secretariat of Culture.

The museum's inauguration, with a significant inaugural exhibit that occupied all of the spaces, would not have been possible without agreement 158/2005 between Secult/AP and the Ministry of Culture – MinC. This agreement allowed Secult/AP to furnish and equip the various installations. The museum now has exhibition rooms, proper storage space, an auditorium that is equipped and suitable for its public, a document processing room, a library, reading room, research room and pedagogy room. At the entrance, a large hall welcomes visitors and also includes a shop that sells crafts. There are also outdoor spaces such as a large veranda, which is used quite often. Thus, the museum has established an exhibit of indigenous crafts available to all the indigenous peoples and residents of Oiapoque, a collection that is quite representative and that is growing through new contributions. The books and magazines from the library have been increasingly requested by indigenous teachers and students to help them in courses. Indigenous teachers from other ethnicities in the region such as the Wayãpi and the Wayana, who are students at the Federal University at Amapá and who are taking courses offered in the city of Oiapoque, also use the library, and leave artifacts for sale in the museum store.



Doc 20: Reading room. Photo by Lux Vidal.



Doc 21: Research room. Photo by Lux Vidal.



Doc 22: Indigenous staff of the museum and assistants. Photo: Lux Vidal.

The agreement between Secult and Minc allowed the revival of an extensive and intensive professional education process, in museology and museographics for seventeen indigenous students who now work at the museum as technicians contracted by the Secretariat of Culture of Amapá State. From April 2007 until July 2009, work was conducted to train the staff members for the specific museum sectors for which each indigenous student planned to work. This process had the assistance of anthropologist Francisco S. Paes, who was hired by the Secretariat of Culture.

In 2007 the indigenous technicians at the Museum attended training courses in preventive conservation, history of indigenous America and of Amapá and administration and management. In 2008, training modules were offered in anthropology, archeology, community journalism and newsletter editing, textual reading and production, audiovisual language, museology, documentation, educational action and research methods.

### **Collections and Exhibitions about the Indigenous Peoples of the Oiapoque**

An interesting aspect of the cultural revival activities in the villages, from the inauguration of the Kuahí Museum and the request for 250 objects for



Doc 23: Craftsman Joel dos Santos documenting a collection of ritual benches.  
Photo: Lux Vidal.

the exhibit “The Presence of the Invisible – daily life and ritual among the Indigenous Peoples of the Oiapoque,” mounted in 2007 at the Museum of the Indian in Rio de Janeiro, is the formation of various collections, at different times and which when compared with each other reveal a lot about the history of the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque, the role of the museum, documentation, anthropological research and the effective actions of cultural valorization and strengthening. From a comparative perspective of the various collections, each one acquires its own relevance, which reveals the characteristics and value of each one in relation to the others.

The Museum of the Indian in Rio de Janeiro has an old collection, from the 1940s and 1950s about the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque, essentially about the Palikur. It includes valuable objects collected by Eurico Fernandes, a former employee of the SPI in the region and other indigenists. The documentation is deficient and the description is summary. There are pieces of feather art that the Indians no longer produce, or do so with different forms of decoration, as well as old clarinets, the famous *turé*, and delicate objects that serve as invitations for the rituals, in addition to small wood artifacts that the women used during rituals to ask for rain. There is also a collection of fishing equipment; which have not changed until today, they are the same artifacts made in

wood, *taboca* [a bamboo], *curuá* thread and hammered iron. In 2007, they had the same shapes and methods of regular use as in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, comparing the typical Palikur hats, while in the past the neck covers, made of stripes of *buriti* palm trees, were always decorated with geometric shapes, today the indians paint more figurative designs with mythic themes or those of daily life, or even inspired from covers of magazines or DVDs.

We know that there is a Palikur collection in Europe, at the Museum of Gothenburg, but we have not consulted it. It is composed of objects collected by Curt Nimuendajú in 1926, when he studied in the region. There is also a small collection at the Paraense Emilio Goeldi Museum, which is not substantial and has little documentation, but has some Galibi-Kali'na ceramics from Oiapoque, crafts that are no longer produced, which were brought by the anthropologist Expedito Arnaud in the 1960s.

The first more systematic and documented collection, donated to MAE at USP was one that I conducted among the Palikur, Karipuna and Galibi-Marworno in the 1990s. The Indians made few artifacts for sale, mainly necklaces, but they used decorated gourds, baskets, especially for working with manioc, as well as graters and sculptures for the *turé* festivals - staffs and benches - as well as musical instruments.

This collection of 260 pieces was not based on an a priori plan, but resulted from field research that began in 1990 in the region by teachers and students of the anthropology department of the University of São Paulo, linked to the Nucleus of Indigenous History and Indigenous Studies. There is a good representation of all the categories of crafts, the objects are well-documented, but from an aesthetic perspective it is weak. The project of cultural revival had still not been started nor the research about the markings on the various mediums. Thus, it was a historic moment, it was the first collection that reviewed the beginning of studies among the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque. It followed a theoretical line that emphasized the history and processes and recognized the heterogeneity of the cultural manifestations in the region. This collection is inserted among that older one, at the Museum of the Indian and of the two collections mentioned below, which are the fruits of the cultural valorization projects in the villages, and the research about indigenous cosmology, shamanism, immaterial culture and heritage, with the training of indigenous researchers, and the construction of the Kuahí Museum.



Doc 24. Photo: Paulo Copolla.

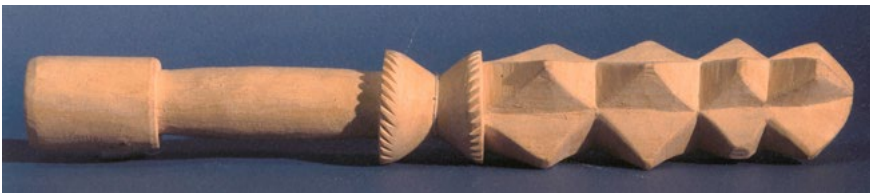


Doc 25.  
Photo: Lux Vidal.



Doc 26 – 27: Feather hat used by men during the turé ritual with geometrical and figurative scenes. Photos: Lux Vidal.

Doc 28: War club. Photo: Miguel Chaves.



The collection of the Kuahí Museum includes more than 300 objects, which were produced in the villages for the Museum and which represent all of the most expressive artifacts of daily and ritual use as well as pieces made for sale. The collection also includes some archeological artifacts and wooden sculptures from the Palikur people, which are directly related to indigenous astronomy. At the large inaugural exhibit for Kuahí, in 2007, the Indians wanted to display the entire collection that they had. They mounted the exhibit, with little museological criteria, but which expressed a cosmological dimension, the relationship of the objects with the invisible. A *caxiri* beer vessel was placed on top of a support pillar and appeared like a *karuanã*, an enchanted object that dominated the other artifacts, especially the sculptures of supernatural beings. But in 2010, the museum team reorganized the exhibit. They did something very beautiful, but I was surprised, because now everything was divided, daily life in one place, and ritual life in another. And for each category exhibited, there was just one little thing, just one object. The Indians said that the way that it was before they could not explain to the school groups and other visitors the order of the exhibition. Thus, all the large sculptures, representing invisible and dangerous entities, were taken to the technical reserve space. On the week of the Indian of 2011, however, the Indians mounted in the Museum Hall a complete structure for the realization of a *turé* ritual, when those sculptures were placed again in that sacred space, indicating that in addition to being museum pieces, they are entities, people present in that context.

In sum, both for the collection of the Kuahí Museum and for the exhibition “The Presence of the Invisible,” at the Museum of the Indian, two large and very high quality collections of ethnographic artifacts were produced, a fact that surprised everyone, even the Indians themselves. When the artifacts collected in the villages along the various rivers reached the Kuahí Museum and were stored in two rooms while waiting for their destination, the group of objects caused quite an impact. Some Indians said that they had never seen certain artifacts, they did not know them. Others did not stop asking questions and taking pictures. In fact, they did not know that all these things still existed and could have value in other contexts. The artifacts gathered under the form of a collection represented something new for them, especially the collection for exhibit in Rio de Janeiro.

In the museum storage there is yet another collection, the result of the



Doc 29: Collecting objects in the villages. Photo: Francisco Paes.



Doc 30: Arrival of the collection at the Kuahí Museum. Photo: Francisco Paes.





Docs 31 – 34: Collected artifacts for exhibition in Rio de Janeiro, assembled at the Museum Kuahí.  
Photos by Francisco Paes.





Doc 35. Geometrical symbolic patterns on basketry. Photo: Lux Vidal.



Doc 36. Carving of a shaman's bench representing a bird. Photo: Lux Vidal.

Cultural Revival project APIO/PDPI – MMA. While the elders passed on their knowledge to the younger ones, the artifacts produced were taken to the offices of APIO and stored in a room. They are valuable pieces, many of them experimental and testament to the great effort at the transmission of knowledge among the generations. The collection includes very old pieces that are no longer made, but also innovative pieces, both in terms of form and design. In 2007, this collection was included in the archives of the Kuahí Museum, but as a specific and separate collection, a witness to this work of revival.

In the same year, the Museum of the Indian, in Rio de Janeiro displayed the large exhibition mentioned above, “The Presence of the Invisible – daily and ritual life of the Indigenous Peoples of the Oiapoque,” an exhibit organized in partnership with Iepé – the Institute of Indigenous Research and Education, with support from BNDES.

At the time, the book was published *Povos Indígenas do Baixo Oiapoque – o encontro das águas, o encruzo dos saberes e a arte de viver*, [The Indigenous Peoples of the Lower Oiapoque – the meeting of the waters, a crossing of knowledge and the art of living], which was a publication made for the Indians and indigenous schools.

This exhibition was a risky but successful adventure. After the inauguration of the Kuahí Museum and the end of the Cultural Revival project, we thought of giving greater visibility to the shamanic, ritual and artistic expressions of the indigenous peoples of the Oiapoque. José Carlos Levinho, director of the Museum of the Indian – Funai (Brazil’s National Indian Foundation) who was responsible for the revitalization of this institution, suggested presenting a large exhibit. I had a specific conceptual proposal in mind and we assembled a team to execute it. A beautiful collection was



Doc 37: An outdoor turé dance at the inauguration of the exhibit at the Museu do Índio, Rio de Janeiro in 2007. Photo: Acervo do Museu do Índio.

acquired from different indigenous peoples of the region, and was collected and wrapped at the Kuahí Museum under the orientation of Francisco Paes, who was also responsible for bringing it to Rio de Janeiro with help from the Brazilian Air Force. To assemble the exhibit, we used older pieces from the archives of the Museum of the Indian, gathered in the 1940s and 50s by inspector Eurico Fernandes of SPI. Thus, old and poorly documented collections were reinserted in the museuographic context and served as a model for the Indians of today.

The central idea for the exhibit was to reveal the cycle that ran from diagnosing and curing the ill, the work that the shaman conducts in his home, in the *tocai*, smoking, singing, playing the *maracá*, conversing with the *karuanã*, the invisible, assisted by the *paliká* and an attentive audience, to the collective ritual, when this shaman organizes a *turé*, a public ritual, in which the invisible beings who helped in the cures are called to participate in the ceremony and honored with songs, dance and lots of *caxiri* beer. Among these two poles, where the cosmic dimension of the cures and festivities are emphasized, all the artifacts are presented that participate in this context, with their beautiful forms and ornamentation, the marks. The large hats stand out, as well as the ceramic dishes, the sculpted benches, the engraved gourds,



Doc 38: General view of the turé dance. Photo: Acervo do Museu do Índio.

the basketry and the musical instruments: the *cutxi* noise horns, the *turé* clarinets and the *maracás*. From the domestic environment are sacks of flour, hammocks, football trophies, the banner of the Holy Ghost, and a family altar with their saints, candles and colored ribbons.

Thirty Indians came to the inauguration, after having helped in the finishing touches and the mounting of the *laku*, a sacred space, in the Museum's outdoor grounds, where at night they presented a *turé*. The travel from Oiapoque to Rio in the rainy season along the rutted BR-156 had not been easy for them. But a visit to the Cristo Redentor made up for all the sacrifices.

In 2009, using the vast material produced during the execution of the Iepé/Petrobras Cultural project, a traveling exhibit was assembled with banners that circulated through the villages. This exhibit was the result of a workshop and publication (Iepé/Museu Kuahí:2009) related to the *turé* ritual complex, which is very present in the region, and which emphasized the cosmological aspects of this manifestation, the fabrication of the objects present in the ritual and their ornamentation, as well as the dance and music performance itself.

In 2009, the Kuahí Museum received an exhibit about the social organization of the Waiãpi, "Jane Reko Mokasia," encouraging greater approximation and exchange among the indigenous peoples of Amapá. This allowed the regional population and the Indians of the Oiapoque to have contact with that



Doc 39: Preparatory workshop of the cross-border exhibit, in the village of São José do Oiapoque. Photo: Anne Courtois Vidal.



Docs 40 – 41: The indian team of the Museu Kuahí preparing a new exhibit. Photos: Lux Vidal.

interesting material and know another cultural reality.

In 2010, on the day of the Indian in April, a cross-border exhibit was inaugurated, “Kali’na Tilewuyu Memory and Identity,” which was divided into two parts: “They left for the country of the white man - 1882 and 1892” and “The Galibi Kali’na Tilewuyu of Brazil - 1950-2010.”

This initiative was part of the educational activities of the indigenous researchers and of the cultural registration and valorization that was being conducted by the Iepé, in the realm of the project Strong Points of Culture “Art and Life of the Indigenous People of the Amapá and northern Pará,”

financed by the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) of the Ministry of Culture (Minc).

Due to a greater approximation among the Indians on both side of the border, the idea arose to conduct a cross-border exhibit between Brazil and French Guyana, which would present historical facts about the Galibi Kali'na of French Guyana and the life and history of the Galibi Kali'na who migrated to Brazil in 1950, addressing different times and places, such as Brazil, French Guyana and Europe, from the universal exhibitions of the late 19th century until today. With these two faces, the historic and the contemporary, in different spaces, the exhibition was quite rich, because in reality it presented different histories, events and sea voyages in time and in space and encompassed various exhibitions organized since the 19th century, which were articulated with each other over time.

In May 2011, the Kuahí Museum received the ethnographic exhibit "Weaving Art, Weaving Life: Tiriyó and Kaxuyana women," organized by Iepé and the Museum of the Indian – FUNAI and assembled by the staff of Kuahí. The exhibit, which portrays the art of weaving with cotton, seeds and beads of the Tiriyó and Kaxuyana women, who live on the western portion of the Tumucumaque Indigenous Park in Pará, is the result of a program of cultural valorization underway since 2006, among women ranging in age from 12 – 80, from more than 20 villages. This exhibit was very much appreciated by the Indians and by the Oiapoque population due to the importance of the beads used both in making traditional indigenous artifacts and in contemporary jewelry.

In 2010 and 2011, as part of the activities of the project called Cultural Strong Point - Art and Life of the Indigenous Peoples of Amapá and northern Pará, the Iepé promoted a series of workshops about the production and sale of cassava flour, which resulted in the organization of a new exhibit at Kuahí and in a publication prepared by the Indians themselves.

The research activities were organized to join in the workshops the indigenous researchers of the Kuahí Museum and farmers from the villages. This procedure of integration produced a rich and varied collection of information, which came from the four indigenous groups of the Oiapoque, with narratives of daily experience and also narratives permeated by individual or group memories.

The researchers were responsible for registering traditional knowledge,



Doc 42 – 43: Preparing the exhibit on manioc fields and cassava flour production. Photos: Lux Vidal and Esther Castro.

organizing the data, editing and entering the texts, and for producing designs and photo albums. This research was published in the book, “A Roça e o Kahbe – Produção e comercialização da farinha de mandioca” (Iepé: 2011) “The Planted Ground and the Flour House – Production and Sale of Cassava Flour” and was conceived for use in indigenous schools.

It was quite significant to begin the workshop with the most subjective aspects: personal statements of each participant, memories of childhood and of the elders, the expression of emotions and feelings, at times explicitly ambivalent, something that wound up characterizing and differentiating each person in the light of their personal experience and life history.

The participants in the workshop did not feel foreign to the theme studied, but as protagonists of the research that expressed the importance that the indigenous peoples of Oiapoque attributed to agricultural activity, which is considered a central element of indigenous culture and as the principal means of subsistence and income, one that is reliable and sustainable.

The participants also agreed about the need to pay tribute to agricultural work and the farmers, while recognizing that the work is hard and tiring, which the myths reveal and confirm. The workshop and the promise of a publication and exhibit also had a positive repercussion in the villages, as it did among the indigenous teachers. Since the participants were representatives of the four ethnicities that inhabit the region of the Lower Oiapoque, there was an effort, to the degree possible, to register in the four native languages (Portuguese, patois, Palikur and Galibi) the name of the artifacts, the sequence of work in the fields, and the steps for processing cassava. The statements reveal the variety of procedures among the different ethnic groups.

An environment of mutual cooperation was created in the workshop



Doc 44 – 45: – Visitors from Brazil, French Guyana, Surinam and Guyana at the inauguration of the exhibit on manioc fields and cassava. Photos: Luís Donisete B. Grupioni.

activities, small workgroups were formed among the museum employees (who themselves are farmers in their communities, when they are on vacation) and the participants from the villages, who are fulltime farmers and recognizably better informed about the practices involved in the production of a variety of agricultural products. The information provided by these farmers caused admiration and respect. On the other hand, the museum employees, who are younger, better trained for research and the museographic activities such as registration and documentation, helped the indigenous people from the villages to record their talks by transcribing and translating narratives and myths, and typing and organizing the data, which pleased the people of the village, given that in most cases they were “relatives.” Everyone felt inspired and “at home” at the Kuahí Museum.

The curatorial proposal of this new exhibition was to make even more clear the steps of these continuous and daily activities, which extend from the field to local or regional commerce. A folder was organized and published at the time, to be distributed at the exhibition.

The scenographic project was conducted in two steps. A first with a scenography workshop realized at the Kuahí Museum in February 2012, when the indigenous researchers had the opportunity to receive instructions about theoretical issues and practices of mounting exhibits, such as measures and proportions of objects and use of space. They made models and miniatures of artifacts and reflected on the options to express the theme of the exhibition.

Later, at a second moment, in July 2012, an exhibit was assembled at the Kuahí Museum. The indians decided to use many panels with images and a few written panels. Aware of the command that they had of the theme, they preferred to present the exhibit as a script in which they, as the protagonists,



could communicate with the public orally. In the exhibition space, the objects that allow and supported these activities were displayed on stands, which were also restored and painted by the museologists from the Kuahí Museum. Choices must evidently be made in an exhibit, but certain themes were emphatically chosen by the Indians, such as the myths and symbolic practices related to the cultivation and processing of manioc.

All of the panels in the exhibit were translated to French, on separate cards, for the many tourists from French Guyana, who come especially in July and August. The part of the educational activities also deserved special attention.

In April of 2012 space was open to the public for the exhibit “Art and the Knowledge of the Masters.” It was an exhibit curated entirely by the Indians. From the choice of the theme, intellectual conception and scenography, it was conceived of and realized by the group of the Indian museologists of the Kuahí Museum.

The theme of the exhibition is the memory of the Demonstration Project of the Indigenous Peoples (PDPI), in which, at workshops in the villages, the master craftsmen taught the youth apprentices who were interested in the traditional arts.

This process resulted in a separate collection, called the PDPI Collection, which is now exhibited in the main exhibition hall of the museum. The artifacts exhibited present this experience of cultural revival and valorization undertaken in the villages between 2004 and 2007.

Just a few years ago it was common to hear the elders say that much knowledge ran the risk of disappearing because it was dominated by just a few masters who were already quite old. This exhibit shows the work and performance of the masters and their apprentices that gives continuity to their craft and artistic practices and which are promoted to the broader public that attends the Kuahí Museum. Since the artifacts are made by apprentices in conjunction with the masters, the exhibit shows various examples from different categories such as basket making, wooden sculptures, ceramics, indigenous jewelry, musical instruments, gourds, the hammock and its implements, in addition to the recording of litanies in Latin and the songs of the *turé*.

This exhibition also reveals the importance that the Kuahí Museum staff attributes to its own museographical archives, which was recently constituted, understanding that this collection represents the legacy of the recognized masters in indigenous lands as great craftsmen. It displays an awareness of

the importance of transmitting the knowledge between the generations and recognition of the work of the youths that participate in these activities. It is also a recognition by the museum staff of the importance of respecting the most elderly since they are the bearers of a tradition that can be lost if it is not periodically revived.

As an example of this curatorial proposal a room was reserved to present the works of a Mr. Wet, an excellent Palikur craftsman and artist and his disciples, highlighting their creations related to astronomy, such as sculptures about the constellations related to the rains “and to the great rituals, such as the Dance of the Flutes, the *aramtem*. In these dances, the shamans sculpt constellations in the form of wooden benches. To sit on the bench of the Great Snake, is thus to see the world from the perspective of this creature. The sculptures, in a certain way, become a way of seeing the world as did the stars of the rains.” (Green, Lesley and Green, David: 2011).

Another small room was reserved to exhibit only one Galibi Kali’na piece of great value, which was recovered during the project: a white cotton hammock made by two Galibi Kali’na women, one older and another younger, although it is an object that is no longer in use in the village. This single hammock is exhibited in a specific space, accompanied by a basket that has a wad of cotton and the spindle used to prepare the thread.



Doc 46: Basket with wad of cotton and spindle for preparing the White hammock. Photo: Lux Vidal.

These two craftswomen died in 2012 and there is no one else among the Galibi Kali'na of Brazil capable of spinning cotton and weaving this kind of hammock, for this reason this artifact reffers already to the past, although a recent one. A banner, with some explanations and photos of the two crafts-women, completes this spare and moving installation, which is important for the Indians of the region, and especially for the Galibi Kali'na.

## Conclusion

These projects allow the Kuahí Museum to perform a role of great importance, by presenting the change in perception of the indigenous people about their own cultural production. From objects of common usage that can be sold or discarded, the artifacts of the collections are transformed into objects that serve as documents. This is a way to reconstruct the world of objects, leading to a process of reinterpretation and creation of meanings. This new positioning of the cultural production allows a different eye, which is distant and critical of this production. At the same time, it makes the administration of the cultural production more interesting and integrated to the modern world. The Kuahí Museum is also inserted in its regional context and close to the villages, so there is no danger of an extreme decontextualization, given that these artifacts continue to be used in the daily life of the indigenous communities.

The Kuahí Museum has been visited frequently and praised by the indigenous visitors, residents of Oiapoque and of all of Amapá, in addition to numerous tourists, especially from the Guyanas and France. The educational activities of the museum for the local elementary and high schools of the city



Docs 47 –48: Schools visiting the Museum Kuahí. Photos: Ana Paula N. Fontes.



Doc 49 : The America's Cup exhibited in the Kuahí Museum with the presence of local authorities. Photo: Lux Vidal.



Doc 50. A view of the main street of Oiapoque, from the Museum entrance hall. Photo: Lux Vidal.



Doc 51. Oiapoque public event held at the Museum. Photo: Lux Vidal.

of Oiapoque have also been important.

Another interesting aspect in relation to the Kuahí Museum is that the delay in its implementation led the Indians to appropriate it for themselves, as they made repeated calls for the government to inaugurate it. The museum thus appears to them as another conquest of the indigenous movement. As a consequence of this process, the Kuahí Museum is now considered to be one of the indigenous institutions in the region, along with the indigenous associations and FUNAI (which are also administered by the Indians), that is, the museum has become a political subject in the institutional indigenous context of the region, and has a power of representation. Moreover, many events in the city of Oiapoque are held at the museum, because of the good quality of the space that it offers, which also adds to the prestige of the Indians in the



Doc 52: Visitors meeting in front of the Museum. Photo: Lux Vidal.

urban and municipal context.

A question to be considered relates to the documentation. There is a concern about which documents should be included in confidential archives and only be accessible to the indigenous peoples, and which should be accessible to the public. That is, the museum raises a series of very current discussions about intellectual property and forms of documenting and promoting indigenous culture, not abstractly, but very concretely.

Translation: Jeffrey Hoff

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