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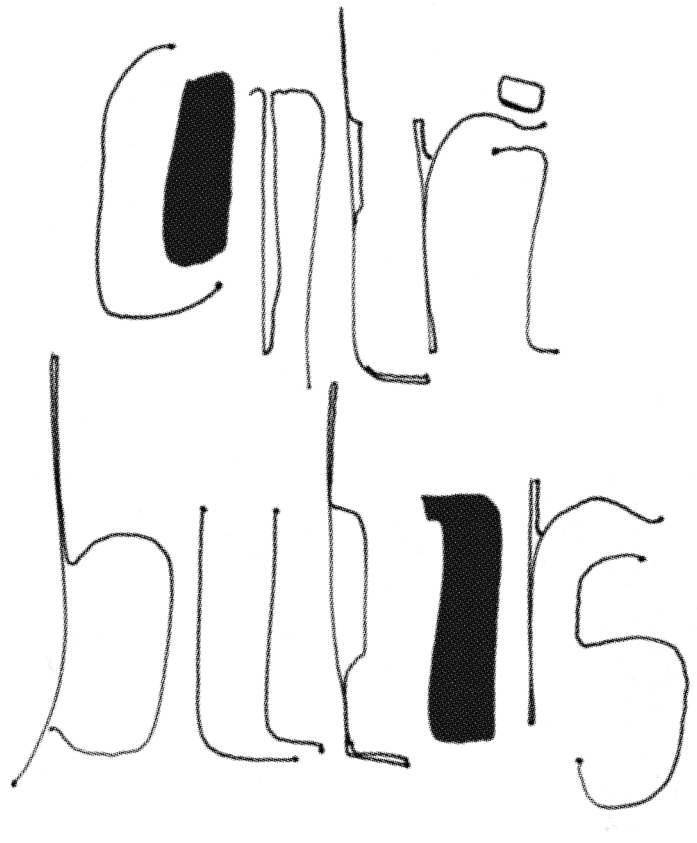
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Las Nietas de Nonó is comprised of sisters Lydela and Michel from Puerto Rico. They work at the intersection of theatre, performance, dance, visual art, activism, ecology, and emancipatory education. Practices found in their neighbourhood such as the expansion of ancestral know-ledge, the exchange of produce grown locally and the re-use of found materials for artistic projects led to the creation Patio Taller in their paternal grandparents’ former house.

Lucy R. Lippard is a writer/activist/sometime curator, and author of 24 books on contemporary art activism, feminism, and place. She lives off the grid in rural New Mexico, where for twenty years she has edited the monthly community newsletter, *El Puente de Galisteo*.

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Koleka Putuma is an award-winning poet and theatre practitioner living in Cape Town, South Africa. In both her theatrical and poetic work Putuma insists on modes of visibility and offers a space for healing. Her writing explores the idea of authority in various spaces—academia, religion, politics, relationships—to ask what has been learnt and what must be unlearned. She is the author of the bestselling collection of poems, *Collective Amnesia* (uHlanga, 2017).

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Suely Rolnik is a Brazilian psychoanalyst, author of more than 200 essays and many books and translations, curator and professor at the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). While exiled in Paris in the 1970s, she obtained bachelor and master degrees in Sociology and Philosophy (Sorbonne Paris 8) and a master and PhD (D.E.S.S.) in Clinical Human Sciences (Sorbonne - Paris 7). She also obtained a PhD in Social Psychology from PUC-SP after her return.

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Juergen Teller studied at the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Photographie in Munich, before moving to London in 1986. He has since successfully navigated both the art world and commercial photography, shooting high profile fashion campaigns for brands such as Céline, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs and Vivienne Westwood. He currently holds a professorship of photography at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste Nürnberg.

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Marina Vishmidt is a writer and editor. She teaches at Goldsmiths, University of London and at the Dutch Art Institute. Her work has appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Ephemera*, *Afterall*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Australian Feminist Studies* and *Radical Philosophy*, and she is currently completing the monograph *Speculation as a Mode of Production* (forthcoming in 2018).



Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena, 2018. Installation view, Museu de Arte do Rio
Courtesy of Museu de Arte do Rio

A Way of Working Together

On Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena

Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente

This text gathers a series of thoughts and reflections somehow related to the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena* (*Indigenous Rio de Janeiro*)—thoughts and reflections about strategies, positions and questions that emerged during the process and during the time the exhibition was open to the public. The exhibition, presented at the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR) from 16 May 2017 to 25 March 2018, was a project of collective and collaborative construction between indigenous communities and individuals living in the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro, a curatorial team composed of Clarissa Diniz, José Ribamar Bessa and ourselves (Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente), a group of researchers and the permanent staff of the museum. The project was constructed through a series of meetings in the museum and indigenous villages in the region, with members of those communities and from other regions of Brazil, which generated the conceptual parameters, the methods and a large part of the attitudes that would define the rest of the process. Occupying a whole floor in the building, the exhibition was composed of works (videos, drawings, photographs, murals, sound installations, objects) commissioned from indigenous individuals or groups. We emphasised production by indigenous people and, if necessary for technical reasons, coproduction by indigenous people with non-indigenous people. Indigenous presence was secured in all areas of work, from the curatorial team to the graphic design and visual identity, in the mediation activities and in the public events. The following text adopted the same strategies, with contributions from two members of the curatorial team, one Guarani Nhandeva and the other *juruá*.¹

¹ In Guarani language, *juruá* identifies non-Indigenous people.

The Great Snake

Everything begins with the great snake. Or thus begins for some, for the peoples of the Alto Rio Negro—the Dessana, the Baniwa, the Tukano and some others from the three hundred Indigenous peoples who today inhabit the territory we know as Brazil. This snake emerged in a time when there was no water, no trees, no land. Then, in the Guanabara Bay, where the city of Rio de Janeiro is located today, a cobra-canoe was created and, from her, from her belly, humanity would be born. From Guanabara, the cobra swam up along the northeast and north coast, until the Island of Marajó, where she entered the Amazon River. She continued until the Alto Rio Negro, where along the journey several groups of men descended in different locations, forming what are today the diverse peoples of the region.

This snake is also a beginning for *Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena*, an exhibition with a Guarani title, organised for the MAR with and by Indigenous peoples and individuals who live in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The snake is and is not from here: she is born here, in the place the city occupies today, but she belongs to the history of peoples who are very far away, and who have ways, traditions and histories different from the peoples who traditionally inhabited the region. Some things have, of course, changed, mostly as a consequence of the invaders who arrived from Europe more than five hundred years ago. Now some of the peoples from the Alto Rio Negro live in Rio de Janeiro. For example Denilson Baniwa, the artist who designed the great snake that occupies most of the surface of the walls, hugging the exhibition and, by doing so, providing a frame for it.

The snake, as an origin, means history as the production of difference. In the exhibition, a narrative of difference enters via Baniwa’s designs of the snake and other figures taken from the origin narratives of peoples such as the Dessana, the Krahô, the Yanomami, the Guarani and others. It enters via the graphic work of Priscilla Gonzaga, designer, non-indigenous, from Pernambuco to and via documents, images, and histories created or registered by indigenous or non-indigenous people today, recently or during the more

than five hundred years of occupation and violence—and before the arrival of the Portuguese to the coast of Bahia in 1500, an area that is still known as the Discovery Coast.

Dja Guata Porã

Everything begins with a series of meetings, organised by MAR, starting in 2016. Meetings with the name that would eventually become the title of the exhibition, *Dja Guata Porã*, which in Guarani refers to a ‘walking together’ as well as ‘walking well’. The trajectory of this walking is not defined from the beginning, but is rather constructed in a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledges (and peoples), which therefore implies conflict, but not confrontation. A conflict that will always exist, because the indigenous and non-indigenous are different bodies that talk together, moving according to their respective demands. A construction that will always be made without a predefinition, because the living object in movement needs to appear in varied versions.

Before the meetings there was perhaps another beginning: an irritation, a disagreement with the common ways of the visual arts and their institutions, which had been applied to the organisation of projects on indigenous culture in recent times in Brazil. The interest in indigenous cultures and their cosmologies, the concern for the violences imposed on the indigenous peoples of Brazil, are more common than ever before among non-indigenous Brazilians. The indigenous struggles are now part of some generalist political agendas. Elements from indigenous culture are incorporated into practices of life by parts of the population who until recently had no contact with those questions, struggles and practices. But this is not a matter of topic, of theme.

The very ways of doing are important: if the presentation of indigenous practices and elements happens without the negotiation with indigenous people, the violence of the colonial process is simply reproduced. Perhaps the act of appropriation has an element of appreciation, but it is much more than that. Tutorship implies concern, but such response is not the only way (or the best one) to demonstrate care. The processes of

decision, the rhythms, the formats, the ways in which exchanges happen, the goals pursued, the languages used ... all these shape different paths and ways of walking.

How to Work?

A different kind of walking implies always showing conflicts and misunderstandings, and from them accepting the need to establish a dialogue with all the participants, in order to hear what each group or community wants to show and why. A more democratic walking, which brings the ways of walking of groups closer to their lived realities. That is why *Dja Guata Porã* couldn’t happen without the meetings, without convoking groups and individuals—such as Edson Kayapó and Josué Carvalho Kanhgág, people from the Guarani villages of Araponga, Sapukai, Itarypu, Bracuí or Rio Pequeno, the Associação Indígena da Aldeia Maracanã, the Centro de Etnoconhecimento Sociocultural e Ambiental Caiuré, Eliane Potiguara or Niara du Sol ... They embarked on a trajectory, dedicating their bodies to a process that nobody could preview or control—listening to perspectives, listening to stories.

Because everything begins with stories and histories being told. And then, the histories having begun, problems might emerge. The problem, already defined, predetermined, is not the beginning—that would be the way of the *juruá*, a way that, as it begins with a defined problem, doesn’t allow for new demands to appear on the way. In this scenario, the only possible thing to do is to attempt to resolve the given problem. In contrast, in indigenous cosmologies what is aimed at is not the solution of problems, but their prevention, and the creation of tools that appear alongside histories. For example, in relation to *Ywy Rupa*, or Planet Earth: in the indigenous world views it is possible to find all the knowledge necessary to look after the environment in which we walk and live, in order for it not to become a problem. And if the problem were to eventually emerge, the tools to face it will already be available.

Dja Guata Porã, then, is not the solution to any problem. It might be thought of as a walking that provides us with tools for what might happen in the future, or even

in the present. A possible answer to the question, “How to work?” would be “working together”. Certainly it is not the only question—another, fundamental and urgent one, would be indigenous autonomy. Still, working together could be a strategy to secure resources, swap tools and articulate. Working through conflicts to show the diverse faces from different angles, without focusing on a particular version, a specific side, as museums often do. Working together in search of indigenous protagonism—in the cultural projects which are also political projects.

Indigenous Peoples and Their Patrimony

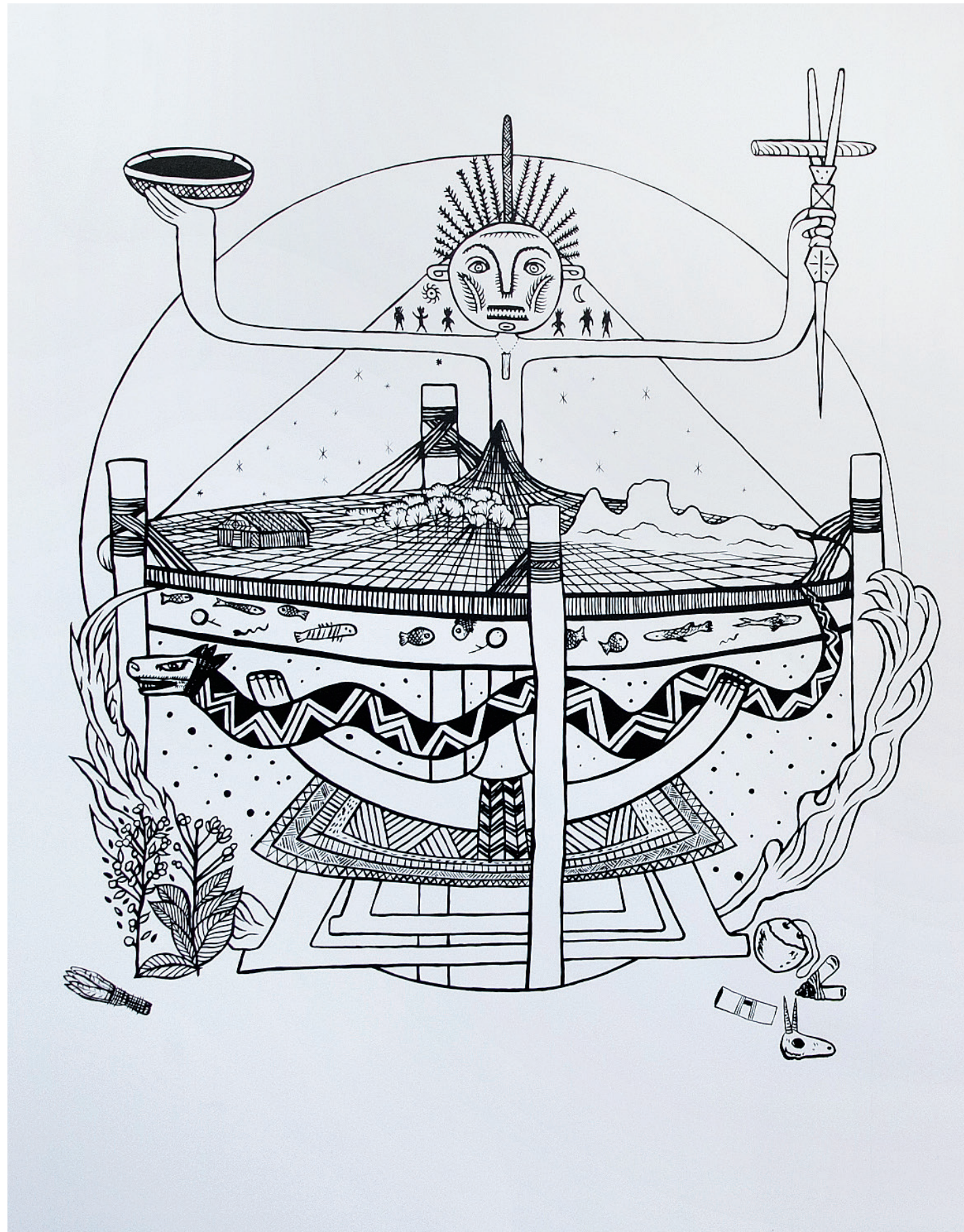
Everything begins with ignorance. In Brazil, the indigenous peoples are not familiar; they are literally unknown to the rest of the Brazilians. It is not uncommon to hear stories of indigenous peoples that tell of discrimination, of being mistaken for citizens from other countries, as if in Brazil there were no more indigenous people. The schoolbooks distributed in the public education system insist on the ‘generic Indian’, not actualised, as if he were a being from the past. They don’t show the linguistic or cultural diversity of these populations. Museums could contribute to changing this situation. But only if they do not impose their perspective, but rather expose themselves fully to the varied knowledge of the communities to which collected objects and knowledges in their different forms and levels belong. Considering ethnic differences in this way shows the need to think about how to preserve patrimony and develop tools to manage it. In *Dja Guata Porã*, the Guarani, the Pataxó, the Puri, the indigenous in urban contexts were presented as separate groups in juxtaposition, showing the different ways of being indigenous today, in Rio, in Brazil.

To assert these distinctions it is important to identify and create a material and immaterial patrimony for each people, beginning from its own way of understanding the world. This patrimony needs to be recognised and studied, in order to gain respect within its *teko*, its way of being individual. Museums can provide bridges and provoke dialogues that might reach the indigenous villages. This becomes a way of giving each group an opportunity to articulate what it knows—for



Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena, 2018. Installation views, Museu de Arte do Rio
Courtesy of Museu de Arte do Rio





Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena, 2018. Installation views, Museu de Arte do Rio

Courtesy of Museu de Arte do Rio

example, of protecting the environment, which is a fundamental aspect of protecting all indigenous cultural patrimony. Patrimony is not reduced to objects to be consumed as a tourist item, nor is it a past. It is the base from which a better future might be built for everyone, not just a specific ethnic group. Indigenous communities take this extremely seriously through their histories, their knowledge, which have kept nature on its feet. Yet this is not just the responsibility of the indigenous; this knowledge needs to be shared to enable collaboration—with public administrations, researchers and communities—because it is in the interest of and for the well-being of all.

Patrimony was also constructed in *Dja Guata Porá*: new works were commissioned in the form of histories told in films; in drawings that show ways of doing; in maps that construct an image of a territory for life, a territory which is at the core of the struggle; in examples of strategies for defence, for articulation, for construction, that might be useful for others, elsewhere.

What is the Museum (Good) For?

Let's imagine territory as a beginning. The museum itself is a construction of territory, where things and people might meet and miss each other, a space that might function as an instrument to provoke conflicts without confrontation, where diverse historical knowledges from ethnic groups are on view, exposed to give access to those who don't know the *arandu* (the knowledges), and the *rete* (the body of the Other). But it also needs to be a place where people can arrive and find themselves well, feeling well—the indigenous as well as the non-indigenous. Hence the welcome. Also the spatial articulation that intends to be clean and generous in connections—*isso também a articulação espacial que quer ser limpa e generosa em conexões*. The multiplicity of perspectives and ways of looking, which show that museum don't need to select, it could just include and offer and offer up itself.

In this way, the space of the museum becomes a bridge where provocations emerge, pointing at several territories; territories that are not just physical spaces but also

bodies in movement, bodies that construct their way of being. A territory of morality, a territory of changes. Because of that it doesn't make sense to think in a closed, delimited version of 'territory'—in contrast to the words of the *juruá*, in which territory becomes a demarcation of spaces and intends to control movement.

It might seem that the museum talks about the time that has already passed, but the past is not actually the matter at hand. It is true that the object presented is always from a time that already happened, recently or not. In *Dja Guata Porã*, memory was brought from the past, and the museum became a place to meet the past to understand our present and to walk (well). In the museum, different ways of looking meet different bodies that are in their own *guatã* (movement) towards a future. Memories are important to identifying the paths for stepping ahead; not for creating more misunderstandings beyond those that were already created. Images without context don't provoke changes, photographs that don't show diverse angles might cause confusion and reinforce prejudice in the gaze of those who don't know the indigenous peoples and their particular ways and languages. From there, again, there is the need for each people—the Pataxó, the Guarani, the Puri—to decide how to display, in the way each considers best; the need also for those who desire to articulate from their position that is (at least partially) individual.

The Bodies

Because it is key to start from the concrete. Because when we speak from a general vision it is as if we were talking without a body. The space of the museum is occupied by different bodies that speak; bodies with limits we need to know about.

The meetings happen between bodies, not objects. The speaking of the object is done through the body—different bodies, living bodies, bodies in movement. The bodies of the participants, who articulate. The bodies of the visitors, who enter into a relationship with what was articulated in the exhibition. Bodies of women, of children, of teenagers. All those bodies need to have a specific path in order to dialogue with each other.

Language is also a body—language has to be of the body. Orality marks what is most important, because speaking the language is living inside the language. Languages that in Brazil amount to more than 250, but that, like the indigenous themselves, are hardly ever heard. That is why *Dja Guata Porã* begins with sounds, singing and speeches in seventeen different indigenous languages of people who permanently or temporarily live in the region, in languages the visitors won't understand, and will feel they don't understand, their bodies moved by that lack of understanding. The body is moved with the forced of the spirit, which is the word. But as the body is concrete it won't always be moved with the direction of the spirit and might suffer an impact after meeting with the Other, whom she can't understand. The spirit gives her force to continue, even with difficulties and conflict. The *teko*, each individual's way of being, contributes to construct, collectively, the *tekoha*, the place that makes possible the way of doing well, of living. However, as people are different, as they have different ways of looking, misunderstanding will always exist. That is why it is important to discuss starting from the concretisation of each one's *teko*—from its language, from its demands, and through its perspective.

Art, Artists

The artist is not, necessarily, at the beginning—*artista não está, necessariamente, no começo*. That is why *Dja Guata Porã* is an exhibition of participants, not artists. People who consider themselves artists, people who don't; adults and children; people who contribute ideas, objects, their skills or their presence and words; indigenous people, mainly, but also others, non-indigenous.

The word 'art' is also not in the beginning of the exhibition, even though the museum (MAR) has the word 'art' in its name. That appeared to necessitate collecting a short vocabulary of words in indigenous languages that came closest to the thing that the *juruá* consider art: *symuin*, from the Kaingang (that which is pretty, which might be seen as pretty by the person that receives it); *dzeeka*, for the Baniwa (to know how to make, something that someone manages to make from an evolution in their learning, something that is learnt with

the elders and that characterises an exclusively human fabrication, with meaning for humans); *ziapohaw* for the Guajajara (to make, to provoke, to create, to solve); *mevi-revosh-shovima-awe* among the Marubo (work made with the tip of the fingers); *yamiyxop*, within the Tikmu'um (making things, an aesthetic effort that produces spiritual events, constituted by music, singing, with the presence of a multitude of spirit peoples). *Tembiapo*, for the Guarani, refers to an ability that has to do with art and memory. The 'artist' translates the art of the community in her work. Art is generalised, but also an individual manifestation. It is a presentation made from individual experience, but never as an act of claiming a personal position. The valorisation of *tembiapo*, of the abilities of our body, needs to be made by making it clear that it is important that the activity doesn't become an answer constructed from just one perspective. That it serves to contemplate one as all and from all to one, through world views and narratives that explain the world and how this world originates for this or that group. Those who no longer have access to their territory, their forests and rivers, lose their main knowledge, and it becomes necessary to discuss what led to such loss of contact. And that in the process, through the walking, what was lost is re-established, at least in part, creating the conditions to continue, to continue well, in a movement that has the form of an encounter. Movement of talking and searching. Movement of dialogue and of bringing the memory from the past to the present and future. Without forgetting about today, about now, relating the memory of the past to the movement of today. The articulation of the indigenous in an urban context and the indigenous in the context of the village defines the indigenous reality today, and it is connected to the conflict of facing the past and the present. It is a conflict that aims to embody awareness, and in this way makes us able to work out the conflicts of the future.