



Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin Aru Kuxipa | Sacred Secret

TBA21–Augarten, Vienna, in collaboration with Kunsthalle Krems

June 25–October 25, 2015

Press Conference

Thursday, 25 June 2015 4 pm, TBA21–Augarten, Vienna

Opening

Thursday, 25 June 2015 7 pm, TBA21–Augarten, Vienna

Opening symposium: “The Rise of the Phyto Age”

A symposium on healing, curing, traditional Amazonian medicine, and traditional European practices—on ethnobotany, cultivation, and the teaching of plants

TBA21–Augarten, Vienna, June 26–27, 2015

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Aru Kuxipa | Sacred Secret is TBA21’s latest artist-centered initiative of commissioning interdisciplinary and unconventional projects devoted to social and environmental concerns. The collaborative journey that the Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto, the Huni Kuin, and TBA21 Neto’s collaboration with the Huni Kuin people unfolds as an pioneering experiment, establishing a zone of encounter with our “ancestral futures” and an investigation of the teachings of plants and the spiritual nature of objects. “By co-authoring this exhibition with them in their own territory geographically and conceptually, this exhibition is attempting to draw a consensus between different creative impulses, and sensitize an audience which is increasingly interested in work that is informed by other practices. Work that

lies between a fine balance of conscience and meaning is the basis of truth. This new body of work transcends the conceptual framework laid down by previous generations, and allows the art to flow into a narrative that shares its concerns to a public yearning to be further sensitized about issues that affect us all, not just in remote localities in which they were born,” says Francesca von Habsburg, founder and chairwoman of TBA21.

Aru means secret, sacred. *Kuxipa* means like a god. *Kuxipa* is the creator. So *kuxipa* for us is nature: earth, water, forest, wind, sun, moon, paths. All that is nature; all these to us are *kuxipa*, sacred; sacred ancestors, the sacred ancestry. I see *Aru Kuxipa* as a request for permission from the sacred, from the gods of nature, in order to praise this great celebration of this union that is taking place here today. — Txana Bane

Aru Kuxipa expresses the vision and dream of the Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto and the Amazonian artists, plant masters, and *pajés* (shamans) of the thirty-seven Jordão Huni Kuin communities to co-create a place of transformation, a zone of encounter and expression, and a site of healing away from their ancestral lands. Sanctioned by a communal decision to come to Vienna and to perform and share within the space of art the Huni Kuin’s sacred forms of expression, art, ritual, and knowledge, the exhibition traces luminous trajectories into our ‘ancestral futures.’ This encounter forged under the sign of the Huni Kuin’s *Novo Mundo / Novo Tempo* calls for a renewed engagement with and contribution to the world at large, a time of exchange, and a striving for indigenous self-governance and sovereignty.

The exhibition opens into a zone of transition with Neto’s major work from the TBA21 collection—*A Gente se encontra aqui hoje, amanhã em outro lugar. Enquanto isso Deus é Deusa. Santa gravidade* (“We meet each other today, tomorrow in another place. In the meanwhile, God is Goddess. Saint Gravity, 2003”)—fashioned from weightless pink and greenish polyamide forms suspended from the ceiling and intertwined in a voluptuous “embrace.” Here and elsewhere, today and tomorrow, the male and female principles, human and divine: all systems of duality are erased and reunited through the principles of love and union. While removing their shoes, visitors are drawn into an inner space of ritual and healing with objects, *maracas*, feathers, *kuripe* (blowpipes), *kené*, weavings, *jiboia* (snakes), some hanging from the ceiling, others laid out on tables for their use. The spiritual center of the exhibition is demarcated by *NixiForestKupiXawa* (2015), a communal space of gathering, sheltering rituals, celebrations, and immersive contemplation.

Venerated Huni Kuin *pajés* and artists have participated in the preparation and initiation of the exhibition. They enter into dialogue with Neto’s artistic language through a diversity of experiences, expressions, and forms of knowledge: oral history, music, sounds, drawings, weavings, rituals, herbaria, and everyday objects.

Una Isĩ Kayawa, the “Book of Healing,” embedded diligently in the exhibition, compiles for the first time ever descriptions of the 109 plant species used by the Huni Kuin and their applications in various curative treatments. For the Huni Kuin, plant knowledge and the ontology in which it is imbedded are a *mysterium tremendum*, an awe-inspiring mystery that must be approached and revealed with

the greatest respect and thoughtfulness.

The exhibition, conceived as Neto's personal tribute to the Huni Kuin, unfolds as a subtle *parcours*, which transitions from a space of preparation and initiation to the sacred area of ritual, to a room of study and knowledge, culminating in the community's multiple voices of myths and songs. Here Neto mobilizes a deep understanding of indigenous wisdom and tradition and the relational and perspectival nature of the Huni Kuin's world vision. This shared journey marks a crucial extension of concerns that have been evident in his *œuvre* over the past twenty years: an appreciation of the sensuality of being, the unity of bodies and nature, the celebration of life, and a search for deeper forms of union and correspondence.

Unfolding in two institutional venues and over two continents, this collaborative exhibition engages with partners in both Austria and Brazil. While the Kunsthalle Krems focuses on a retrospective view of Neto's nearly two decades of artistic production, TBA21 showcases the artist's latest explorations and engagements.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of symposia and educational programs at TBA21–Augarten.

Curated by Daniela Zyman

Photo Credits:

left:
Ernesto Neto
CanoeKeneJaguarPataLampLight (CanoaKeneOnçaPawLampadaLuz),
2015
Wood, cotton, lavender, glass, crystal, and candles
338 x 525 x 525 cm
Courtesy Ernesto Neto

Installation view: Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin: Aru Kuxpia | Sacret
Secret: TBA21-Augarten © Jens Ziehe, Vienna 2015

right:
Ernesto Neto
A Gente se encontra aqui hoje, amanhã em outro lugar. Enquanto isso
Deus é Deusa. Santa gravidade, 2003
Polyamide, Styrofoam, and rice
650 x 630 x 1620 cm
Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna

Installation view: Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin: Aru Kuxpia | Sacret
Secret: TBA21-Augarten © Jens Ziehe, Vienna 2015
2010

INFORMATION

Exhibition

Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin

Aru Kuxipa | Sacred Secret

Curated by Daniela Zyman

Location

TBA21–Augarten, Scherzergasse 1a, 1020 Vienna, Austria

**As part of their residency, the Huni Kuin will be present with the exhibition from
Wed–Sun. 25 June–05 July, 2–7 pm**

Press Conference

Thursday, June 25, 2015, 4 pm, TBA21–Augarten, Vienna

Opening

Thursday, June 25, 2015, 7 pm, TBA21–Augarten

International Symposium—“The Rise of the Phyto Age”

TBA21–Augarten, Vienna, June 26–27, 2015

Reception by the City of Vienna

A reception hosted by Vice Mayor Maria Vassilakou in honor of the Huni Kuin
City Hall, Vienna, June 24, 2015

Opening Hours

TBA21–Augarten

Wednesday–Thursday, 12–5 pm; Friday–Sunday, 12–7 pm

Free admission

Visitor Information

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Special thanks to:

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The Huni Kuin

The Huni Kuin people (“true men” or “true people”), as they call themselves, became known as Kaxinawá (“bat people”) since their first contacts with *seringalistas* and *caucheiros* (respectively, the Brazilian rubber estate owners and Peruvian itinerant caoutchouc extractors). In Brazil, they live in the state of Acre in twelve indigenous lands, with an aggregate area of 653 thousand hectares, distributed around the Purus, Envira, Murú, Humaitá, Tarauacá, Jordão, and Breu rivers.

With a little more than 7,900 individuals, the Huni Kuin constitute 45% of the total indigenous population and they are the largest of the 18 ethnic groups living in Acre. Their language belongs to the linguistic family Pano, that they call Hatxa Kuĩ (true language) and whose abundance manifest also in their musical diversity and material culture.

The Huni Kuin society, traditionally, has a social organization that turns around groups of extensive families, with prominence on the figure of the *pajé* (shaman) whom they assign a significant role in its culture in helping to maintain the connection with the spiritual realm.

After two generations of working under exploitative conditions, which resulted in a severe genocide that wiped out a large part of their ethnic group, today the Huni Kuin are engaged in a profound process of recovering their rich traditions, beliefs, practices while facing new pressures to protect their land rights.

Una Isĩ Kayawa

Una Isĩ Kayawa (“Book of Healing”), was produced by the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Garden Research Institute (IJBRJ) and originally published by Editora Dantes in 2014 in a bilingual edition (Portuguese and Hatxa Kuĩ). It compiles descriptions of the 109 species used in indigenous, as well as information about the region of occurrence and forms of treatment. The work of researching and organizing the information took two and a half years and was coordinated by the botanist Alexandre Quinet of the IJBRJ. The book was conceived by the *pajé* Agostinho Manduca Mateus Īka Muru, who documented the sacred knowledge of medicinal plants for thirty years but died shortly before the work was completed and produced (and drawn entirely) by the Huni Kuin people as a representation of their healing philosophies. In addition to presenting information about plants, the book uses stories and drawings to inform readers about the culture of the Huni Kuin people, such as their eating habits, their music, and their views regarding disease and spirituality. To represent the written content in Hatxa Kuĩ, the book’s publisher, Anna Dantes, created a special typographic font inspired by the handwritten letters in indigenous notebooks.

Ernesto Neto

Since the mid-1990s Ernesto Neto (b. 1964) has produced an influential body of work that explores constructions of social space and the natural world by inviting physical interaction and sensory experience. Drawing on biomorphism and minimalist sculpture, along with neoconcretism and other Brazilian vanguard movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the artist both references and incorporates organic shapes and materials—spices, sand, and shells among them—that engage all five senses, producing a new type of sensory perception that renegotiates boundaries between the artwork and the viewer, the organic and the man-made, as well as between the natural, spiritual, and social worlds.

About TBA21

Founded in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg in Vienna, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) represents the fourth generation of the Thyssen family's commitment to the arts. The foundation is dedicated primarily to the commissioning and dissemination of ambitious, experimental, and unconventional projects that defy traditional categorizations. This approach has gained the collection a pioneering reputation throughout the world. The foundation's projects promote artistic practices that are architectural, context- and site-specific, performative, and often informed by an interest in social aesthetics and environmental concerns. Many of the projects reflect the shift to transdisciplinary practices embracing architecture, sound, music, and science.