

## INTERCULTURALITY IN THE PICTURE WORKS OF JAIDER ESBELL

### *A interculturalidade nas obras imagéticas de Jaider Esbell*

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#### **Abstract**

This research is part of the Master's dissertation presented in the Postgraduate Program in Letters at the Federal University of Roraima, its general objective was to analyze the possibility of including the works of the artist Jaider Esbell, an indigenous person of the Makuxi ethnic group, in art teaching based on from an intercultural perspective. We sought to indicate cultural elements present in his visual works, in contemporary times, that portrayed living symbols preserving the culture of his ancestors. These elements tell stories of their people and serve as a bridge to weave interculturalities when individuals from their own culture absorb and experience them in their identity formation, or when individuals from other cultures can compare or identify elements of their own culture. Throughout the article we present the works of Jaider Esbell, the focus of the research carried out, and highlight their importance for the art scene in the state of Roraima - Brazil. The work methodology was guided by a qualitative approach with a cartographic method in which the artist's works were analyzed seeking to indicate elements that enable the intercultural approach to/in art teaching. In addition to the authors mentioned, we took the artist Jaider Esbell himself as a theoretical reference, through his published texts.

#### **Resumo**

Esta pesquisa é parte da dissertação de Mestrado apresentada no Programa da Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal de Roraima, teve como objetivo geral analisar a possibilidade da inserção das obras do artista Jaider Esbell, indígena da etnia Makuxi, no ensino de arte a partir de uma perspectiva intercultural. Buscou-se indicar elementos culturais presentes em suas obras visuais, na contemporaneidade, que retratassem símbolos vivos conservando a cultura de seus ancestrais. Esses elementos contam histórias de seu povo e servem como ponte para tecer interculturalidades quando indivíduos da própria cultura os absorvem e vivenciam em sua formação identitária, ou quando indivíduos de outras culturas podem comparar ou identificar elementos de sua própria cultura. Ao longo do artigo apresentamos as obras de Jaider Esbell, foco da pesquisa realizada, e destacamos a sua importância para o cenário da arte no estado de Roraima - Brasil. A metodologia do trabalho foi direcionada pela abordagem qualitativa com método cartográfico em que analisaram-se as obras do artista buscando indicar elementos possibilitadores da abordagem intercultural do/no ensino de arte. Além dos autores mencionados tomamos como referência teórica o próprio artista Jaider Esbell, por meio de seus textos publicados.

**Key-words:** *Interculture; Art Teaching; Jaider Esbell.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Intercultura; Ensino da Arte; Jaider Esbell.*

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## **INTERCULTURALITY IN JAIDER ESBELL' S IMAGE WORKS**

The identity of a society or culture is not something fixed or unique, it is in constant transformation, changing according to the social and political development of each people or social group. They distinguish themselves through their different customs, languages, inventions, values, works and beliefs. Therefore, when dealing with identity in the school environment, we cannot fail to consider relationships and different forms of cultural manifestations. When reporting to the city of Boa Vista, capital of the state of Roraima, in Brazil, we came across schools that have in their classrooms a very large number of indigenous students or descendants of indigenous people, Brazilian and non-indigenous students and, currently a large presence of Venezuelan immigrants, characterizing a culturally diverse space.

Observing the importance of developing studies that involve intercultural issues in art teaching, in this research we seek to highlight the importance of regional culture in art teaching, taking into account that each student belongs to a certain culture and has customs, habits and, in in some cases, a different mother tongue. To think about intercultural issues in art teaching, we chose to bring in the Makuxi indigenous artist Jaider Esbell (1979 - 2021). The artist was born on the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Land (Raposa I) in the municipality of Normandia, state of Roraima. Activist artist as he defined himself, Esbell (2018) through his art addressed political and cultural issues experienced by his people and the indigenous peoples of Brazil and Latin America, becoming one of the renowned indigenous artists in the Brazilian Contemporary Art scene.

### MAKUNAIMANDO<sup>3</sup>

Picture 1 - Map prepared by the researcher representing the State of Roraima and indicating the capital Boa Vista and the city of Normandia



Source: Personal archive, Folder.

Jaider Esbell makuxi artist, was born in the city of Normandia - RR - Brazil, in the Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous land, his grandmother's community of origin, where he lived part of his childhood. In Normandia he studied until high school, at the age of 18 he moved to the capital Boa Vista in the State of Roraima. In the capital he remained working in various jobs until he passed the Eletrobrás Federal Public Exam. He then took the entrance exam at the Federal University of Roraima, having studied and completed the Geography course, according to information contained in the book "Tembetá"<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Reference to the text "Makunaima my grandfather in me", Jaider Esbell, *Iluminuras* magazine, Porto Alegre, v. 19, no. 46, p. 11-39, Jan/Jul, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> TEMBETÁ, This book brings together six interviews carried out with great indigenous leaders and thinkers: Ailton Krenak, Álvaro Tukano, Biraci Yawanawá, Eliane Potiguara, Jaider Esbell and Sônia Guajajara. It is the first volume in a series that seeks to outline an overview of contemporary indigenous thought, exploring plural themes that go beyond indigenous issues, such as culture, education, politics, human rights and ecology. Tembetá comes from Tupy, and is the name of an adornment worn on the lower lip that symbolizes the rite of passage to maturity.

The artist lived in Boa Vista until his death (2021), and during this period he maintained and coordinated the “Jaider Esbell Gallery of Contemporary Indigenous Art”<sup>5</sup>, housing the production and exhibition of his artistic works and those of other indigenous artists. Jaider Esbell had different production techniques in relation to contemporary indigenous art such as: ink pen on canvas and acrylic paint on canvas, he also experimented with natural paints such as genipapo, a plant from the Amazon region and the Brazilian Atlantic Forest.

Through his productions, he exposed his feelings and experiences in defense of Makuxi indigenous culture, as we can see in the following fragment: “The Makuxis live in Brazil, Venezuela and Guyana. Our reality, like other Amerindian realities, is very complex, very rich in diversity and communication” (ESBELL, 2018, p.73). In his productions he presented the worldview of his people. For Esbell, art is an important tool for communication, knowledge and re(meaning), where it constitutes the diversity and values of its people. According to the artist:

O povo Makuxi e a arte. A arte plástica, como linguagem entre os Makuxis, é um evento relativamente novo. Para muitos ainda não há uma compreensão exata de como esse recurso visual pode ser usado positivamente. Para outros, sim, é uma ferramenta poderosa de comunicação e transmissão de valores ou uma forma de manter assuntos importantes em contextos importantes. As escolas avaliam esse recurso como uma possibilidade de aumentar e melhorar a relação dos alunos com seus pares e familiares. Essas relações de diálogo envolvendo o fazer artístico podem estimular as famílias a buscarem conhecer mais e melhor suas próprias histórias e trajetórias, refletindo positivamente na manutenção da cultura. Assim, a arte entre os índios deve, antes de tudo, cumprir um papel elementar, ou seja, sua função cultural e social (Esbell, 2014, p.34).

For the natives to produce their art, keeping their customs, rituals, tales and ceramic utensils alive is a way of expressing and disseminating their culture. After realizing the weaknesses that his people experienced in the face of land demarcation movements and illegal mining practices, Jaider says that he made the decision to be an artist when he was still a child (Esbell, 2018). According to Esbell (2018, p. 25) “[...] this was all very important for the subsequent construction of my work, my artistic identity, my poetic identity, my identity as a thinker” . It was his critical perception that

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<sup>5</sup> The Jaider Esbell Gallery of Contemporary Indigenous Art currently belongs to the artist's family and is led by a team that seeks to work on publicizing the artists' works and disseminating the struggles he fought.

directed him as an artist, giving him awareness and autonomy to present Contemporary Indigenous Art to Roraima, Brazil and the world. Esbell, together with other indigenous artists, started an art movement, which he called “Contemporary Indigenous Art (AIC)”, problematizing the place of indigenous art adopted by the Western Art System, which used the term “indigenous” only as an adjective to Contemporary art. Jaider Esbell, when conceptualizing the term, says:

Quando se diz que é arte contemporânea indígena, parece que ela vem de fora e quer se indianizar aqui com a gente, vinda de um ambiente externo como se os índios não existissem antes. E chegou junto e quer meio que fazer parte, meio que na marra, não sabendo em que conjuntura. Por isso é importante sustentar que é arte indígena contemporânea, porque a arte sempre esteve entre os índios, e hoje quando se argumenta da palavra “contemporânea”, ela se veste, ela capta junto dos seus argumentos essa necessidade, inclusive, de ser comercial; é uma arte de provocação, de promoção e de fortalecimento da cena e das identidades indígenas contemporâneas (Esbell, 2021, p. 49-50).

With focused, strategic and tireless action, Esbell contributes to the struggles of indigenous peoples in Brazil and the world, raising questions that permeate humanity's current complex dilemmas.

### **Jaider Esbell - Life, Works and Contemporary Indian Art.**

#### **Work of art 1: KNOWLEDGE AND DIGNITY**

Picture 2 – Knowledge and Dignity, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 230 cm



Fonte: <https://www.premiopi.com/pag/jaider-esbell/>

Boa Vista, the capital of the state of Roraima, is where the artist Jaider Esbell lived and also where he had his Contemporary Indigenous Art Gallery, located in the Paraviana neighborhood. The gallery was in transition, to an undisclosed location, and at the end of 2021 its relocation project was interrupted by the artist's death. Jaider Esbell was on the rise and was taking part in the 34th São Paulo Biennial, including acting as curator of the contemporary indigenous art exhibition “Moquém\_Surarî”.

The artist Makuxi during the last years of his artistic life identified himself as an activist and preferred to be called that way, as the term refers to the political movement of indigenous artists. For Jaider Esbell, art and life were one and the same. In the work “Knowledge and Dignity” comparisons and criticisms are made, exposing intercultural elements that represent life both for their ethnic group and for other indigenous peoples in Brazil and around the world who suffer persecution from invaders on their lands. According to Esbell (2019), his relationship with Art begins in childhood, living with reality in his indigenous community. Jaider's activist spirit provoked other indigenous artists to tell their stories through Art, united by their similarity with Makumaima, the indigenous God of the Makuxi people, and thus one of his purposes gained strength and visibility.

The relationship with contemporary times, and his ability to live in both worlds, as he stated (the indigenous world and the non-indigenous world) allowed Jaider to propagate his culture, manifesting it in the form of contemporary art in several languages, such as: Painting on canvas, performance, sculptures, fine arts, literature. Their artistic languages, when presented, analyzed and interpreted by individuals from other cultures with elements that resemble each other, represent intercultural. For Canclini (2019, p.348) “All arts develop in relation to other arts: crafts migrate from the countryside to the city; the films, videos and songs that narrate the events of one people are exchanged with others”.

The intercultural approach is written reflexively in the work “Knowledge of Dignity” , in which there are barriers that manifest discrimination against indigenous people, inequalities and differences between objects expressed there by the artist and representation of nature and traditional foods. In an interview with Gonzatto (2021), the artist says that in his works, including the aforementioned work, it is possible to perceive Makuxi cosmology, and the articulation he makes between the indigenous world and the world of non-indigenous people.

Meus avós foram escravos nas fazendas dos invasores, então nasci em dois mundos, literalmente. Percebo que, fora as pressões e imposições do mundo branco sobre meu mundo ancestral, o indígena, há um duplo interesse entre estes. Com meu trabalho de arte, acredito que posso auxiliar ambos nesse entendimento mínimo. As artes podem aproximar mundos, isso pra mim é fato. A minha pesquisa também me leva a crer que, mesmo aparentemente mesclados, esses mundos não se confundem e se fundem. Como tenho acesso a ambos os mundos, busco construir uma consciência de que “naturalmente” estou sendo educado por ambos para ser cada vez mais um veículo, um meio, um canal de fruição e distinção (Esbell, 2021, p. 2).

Esbell brought ancestral knowledge and the knowledge of the colonizer throughout his existence, as the non-indigenous society was part of his education, and he knew very well how to appropriate and master its techniques. The artist believed that the knowledge absorbed in both cultures provided arguments so that through Art it could be the link of cultural harmony in these two worlds.

In “Knowledge and Dignity” , Esbell portrays images that express the reality experienced by indigenous peoples. This work, when observed and interpreted, expresses some type of feeling in the way of life in relation to coexistence, violence or conflicts related to indigenous culture. In the work we can see the artistic characteristics of Jaider, an activist for indigenous causes. In this work, he mixes geographic symbols and elements that represent reality, dividing on one side the format similar to the design of the plan of the Civic Center of Boa Vista, capital of Roraima-BR, and on the other side representing the invasion of the indigenous land where he was born. In the form of criticism, Esbell maps Boa Vista and makes comparisons between two realities, this leads us to different readings and interpretations, therefore, the artist's expression and the various forms of interpretation are effected by the process of interculturality, very well recognized and problematized by the artist. Brazil, according to Fleuri (2003, p.23)

[...] se constitui historicamente como uma sociedade multiétnica tomando-se por base uma imensa diversidade de culturas. Reconhecer nossa diversidade étnica implica ter clareza de que os fatores constitutivos de nossas identidades sociais não se caracterizam por uma estabilidade e fixidez naturais. As identidades culturais – aqueles aspectos de nossas identidades que surgem de nosso pertencimento a culturas étnicas, raciais, lingüísticas, religiosas, nacionais – sofrem contínuos deslocamentos ou descontinuidades (Fleuri, 2003, p. 23).

Esbell, knew very well how to raise questions related to cultural identities, and the complex relationships generated from the encounter between the different cultures that constitute Brazil. In his imagery works he represented the constant movement of these meetings and the results experienced by his Makuxi people and the other indigenous peoples of Roraima. In the work “Knowledge and Dignity” the artist represents the state capital - expressing in the drawing the format of the Center of Boa Vista (known as the Civic Center) which is designed in the shape of a circle from which the main streets and avenues of city. Two of the main monuments in the state of Roraima are concentrated in the Civic Center, the Monument to the Garimpeiro and the Government Palace. They are located on the central axis of the square, one of the main tourist attractions in Boa Vista - Roraima. Jaider Esbell, with this work, criticizes mining activities in Roraima and denounces the massacre experienced in the state's indigenous lands. Always positioning himself as a defender of his people, the artist maintains in his career the denunciations of violence suffered by his people, and by indigenous peoples in general. Currently, mining activity is prohibited and is a major problem for the indigenous peoples of Roraima, as it continues to occur clandestinely and in the period from 2018 to 2022 its practice intensified, due to a far-right genocidal policy carried out by the government of the then president Jair Bolsonaro. It’ s about thinking critically, as he comments (Esbell, 2020, p. 2):

Especialmente os próprios indígenas, aqui em Roraima, inclusive, que tem apoiado toda essa questão de desencadeamento da volta do garimpo, e toda essa violência generalizada, e que poucos fazem para respirar alguns ares de esperança.

In the work, Jaider uses the representation of fish, showing that they are present in food consumption both in the city and in indigenous areas, serving as people's livelihood. In the work of art we can see the representation of more isolated indigenous areas (represented by few dots) and more inhabited indigenous areas (represented by many dots). The Rio Branco - Roraima's main river interconnects communities and is a source of water supply for the capital Boa Vista. It also serves as a source of income for the fishermen class who survive on income from fishing. Elements of fauna and flora - They control the region's ecosystem and are therefore presented in Jaider's works, reinforcing the activist spirit for the causes of his people.



The combination of the prospector and the fish can also be read as a denunciation of the invasion of indigenous lands. The indigenous people are eating fish from the rivers where mercury residues come down due to mining, and they acquire various diseases also brought by non-indigenous men. A recent example of this devastating encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous people caused by the illegal practice of mining is the Yanomami humanitarian crisis that became known worldwide in 2023. This fact can be considered as one of the results of the conflicting encounter of cultures, bringing even deaths both for miners as deaths for the indigenous people and the population of Roraima in general, considering the population's water consumption. The graphic signs like “@” in the works can be understood as the network connections, the media through which the artist shows them to the world, this includes his activist participation on Facebook<sup>6</sup>. This graphic sign can also say that in communities, the majority of which are indigenous, they are also connected to internet technologies, showing their experiences through social networks. The broken barbed wires - we interpret these to be people's invasions of indigenous lands as they advance to another side, which would be the forest. Oars - are used for moving along rivers in the practice of fishing and traveling between communities, they also represent an intercultural symbol, as they are used as a fundamental object for moving around in all regions where there are rivers.

Fences - Barriers erected with wire fences to demarcate indigenous areas invaded mainly by farmers with the aim of destroying the forest to form large grass plantations forming pastures for livestock farming. Deforestation of forest areas destroys the natural habitat of animals that serve as food for indigenous populations. The indigenous person with the prohibition symbol - Declares his revolt by imagining breaking the fence to enter his own land invaded by squatters, as he is worried about future generations represented by the pregnant indigenous woman. In the case of the pregnant indigenous woman represented in the work, it brings up the cultural and traditional issue that involves the rituals transmitted from generation to generation. The bloody footprints - signify in our eyes the massacres, attacks and expulsion of indigenous people from their lands by farmers.

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<sup>6</sup> Facebook do Jaider Esbell Disponível em: <https://www.facebook.com/jaider.esbell>

Em uma entrevista realizada no dia 14 de dezembro de 2018, Jaider Esbell falou dos conflitos vivenciados desde a sua infância, sempre originados na relação com o não indígena. Nasceu em 1979, no final da Ditadura Militar no Brasil, no auge dos conflitos entre indígenas e garimpeiros que exploravam a região do rio Maú. O movimento indígena já estava organizado, mas ainda sem a dimensão que tem na atualidade. Eles tentavam mediar os conflitos e estavam em processo de conscientização, inclusive dos próprios indígenas para o perigo e as consequências do garimpo (Brandão, 2019, p. 64).

There are historical reports of massacres suffered by indigenous peoples throughout Brazilian territory, in many of these massacres, those responsible are not punished due to numerous social and cultural factors, such as: the distance between the fact and justice and the financial power of the aggressors against the indigenous people. The “@” symbol can also mean an uncertain future that surrounds future indigenous generations with new technologies connected to the world that can transform and mix the culture of communities, as the desire to consume new things is also present in indigenous communities, providing access to scientific knowledge on the one hand and causing conflicts in local beliefs on the other. Esbell, in the text “Makunaima, my grandfather in me” points to these changes that have already been occurring in times past.

Empréstimos temos que fazer a todo o momento. Empréstimos que já vêm de longe descaracterizando as coisas, as energias e não queremos nós ter a essência das coisas pois estas coisas não estão para nós a menos que elas mesmas nos sucedam (Esbell, 2018, p. 12).

The connection with the world transforms and proliferates intercultural exchange between people from large centers and indigenous peoples from all over the world, however, this real-time connection can trigger the construction of new identities with the appropriation of cultural values predominant at the moment, as Homi Bhabha states “No culture is ever unitary in itself, nor simply dualistic in the relationship between the Self and the Other” (Bhabha, 2003, p. 69). However, we need to be aware of the ways in which these relationships and exchanges are constructed, so that the practice of violence and silencing of indigenous cultures employed at the time of Brazilian colonization can be broken..

### **Analysis and Characteristics of the work Contemporary Indigenous Art**

Picture 3- “Wazak’ a” , 2011, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



Fonte: <https://www.premiopipa.com/pag/jaider-esbell/>

In the context of the work *Wazak'a* there is a tree that occupies almost the entire screen in the foreground, this tree has various shades of green that range from dark to light, with paths at the top passing between the leaves. On all the paths are the types of fruits from our region: cashew, banana, mango, acerola, taperebá, abacaba, açai and others such as grapes and apples (which are not fruits from our region, but which are planted here). And, in the center above the trunk are bunches of bananas like the strong fruit that survives in the fields of Roraima and serves as a source of food for indigenous people. The fruits falling from the tree as if it were rain and others are already on the ground feeding the animals.

In the background of the work it is possible to see a lighter, cleaner place, like few of Esbell's works, and the paintings in the foreground are as if they came out of the light. In the background there are animals typical of the Roraimense farmland, such as

the giant anteater, armadillo, deer, monkey and tortoise, also feeding on the fruits. In this context, activist Jaider used the Wazak' a tree, belonging to the traditional history of the Makuxi people and symbolizing the "tree of all fruits". The tree represents a source of food and strength for all of the forest, for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and for the animals that live there.

The trunk of the tree, in gradient pink, reflects the artist' s energy:

Minha alma é plenamente colorida, pois me mostra meu avô ancestral Makunaimí. Somos de uma linhagem que tem transformação as bases de nossa forma. As cores são, portanto, assim como som de nossa música, nossa plataforma de existir e proporcionar existência (Esbell, 2021, p.3).

For Esbell (2021, p.3) indigenous peoples have lived for a long time without cultural recognition and have survived to this day. It is currently possible to propagate culture in search of recognition throughout society. According to the artist,

Wazak'á. A árvore da vida, de todas as frutas, de todas as dúvidas, de todos os saberes. Mito/lenda máxima da cosmovisão mais ampla, muito mais abrangente do que a própria consciência e a ciência poderiam alcançar. Coisa de deuses e de adoradores. Cachoeira de lágrimas e fonte de desejos. Representa a sabedoria plena, incontestável e ao mesmo tempo mutável, adaptável à personalidade (Esbell, 2014, p.21).

In this work, nature is the main theme where Esbell exposes "Wazak' a", the tree of all fruits (great tree) from the legend of Makunaima. This work can also have the function of raising people's awareness of environmental and cultural issues by presenting elements that were part of their experience as they belonged to an indigenous ethnic group. It is these aesthetic and communicative elements that constitute his works and can also be part of cultures from other regions. These similarities add values that, when put together, end up exercising cultural exchanges and unions at the same time, thus Jaider Esbell brought intercultural elements into his Art.

According to Silva (2013),

Em nossas relações, estão envolvidas questões culturais e sociais, trazendo diferentes valores e maneiras de viver e respeitar, ou não, o mundo a nossa volta. A necessidade de reflexão e diálogo sobre as relações interculturais se fazem cada vez mais necessárias, ao pensarmos uma educação comprometida com a vida (Silva, 2013, p.24).

Art in this sense can have several functions at the same time, in addition to providing cultural information, it can be an object of relaxation, admiration, and curiosities. Therefore, Art is a strong ally in the educational process and plays a disseminating and collaborative role in education, denouncing or provoking the reader to reflect on cultural/environmental preservation and question attitudes that require changes in the behavior of society in general. Esbell expanded indigenous Art told in literary form and in his works in the field of visual arts, but for this Art to be disseminated and reach people it is necessary to have media channels of communication and this was greatly explored by Jaider in his social networks..

Parece absoluto como se fosse o próprio encantamento tomando forma para atender visualidades. Eis um importante ponto a ser tocado. Em matéria de arte indígena, não algo externo, europeu ou emoldurado, carecemos, nós artistas, de algo dinâmico (agência?) para que se alcance a condição exata de transpor e fazer transpor mundos. Não deixamos de buscar o efeito contrário quando simplificamos a imagem do mito essencialmente fluido para algo limitado a uma imagem (Esbel 2018, p. 22-23).

The ideas presented in works of art such as *Wazak'á* can transmit feelings and boost processes of inspiration, cognition, sensitivity, expression and even creation, as observation, reading and interpretation of everyday situations in themselves are capable of provoke reflections and criticism, whether favorable or contrary to social standards. The artist, when quoting in an interview with Itaú Cultural, about *Wazak'á* states that:

[...] a memória que me remete meu avô contando história e mitos wakaza árvore de todos os tipos de frutos enfim que hoje agente tem a materialização de tudo isso grande monte Roraiama e o makunaima trazendo dessa memória (Esbell, 2020, s/p).

Esbell materialized ancestral memories and knowledge in this work, relating them to our contemporary times. The work *Wazak'á* is part of the indigenous story called “great tree”, there are some versions about it depending on each indigenous ethnic group. In the version of the Makuxi ethnic group, according to Esbell, Makunaima highlights universal decisions about cutting down the “big tree”. According to the artist, the indigenous god Makunaima

Cortou a árvore para dar vida também aos habitantes da savana, aqui nesta parte do mundo. Havia fome, escacez, quando a natureza mostrou para Makunaima e seus irmãos as grandes árvores. Foi o Deus maior, que é a Natureza maior, que por meio da cutia mostrou a Makunaima a grande árvore de todas as frutas e sementes. Não, não era apenas uma, mas, simbolicamente, ficamos com a maior, a mais importante, a primeira. A árvore do bem, que ao tombar o chão também a árvore dos mistérios, a árvore dos outros seres, a árvore proibida que ainda hoje existe o tronco ao lado da árvore da vida derrubada por Makunaima. A natureza deixa portanto Makunaima diante da grande árvore. Deixa ele lá com o pescoço virado para cima vendo e analisando se vai mesmo tomar a grande decisão. Makunaima está parado medindo seu existir (Esbell 2018, p. 148).

The artist's inspiration for producing this work was inspired by the decision of the indigenous god Makunaima to cut down the great sacred tree “Wazak`á” . The legend says that Makunaima needed to give a concrete sign of his universal decisions by cutting down the “great tree of all fruits” in the name of the collective and the lives of his brothers, as there was already a lack of food everywhere. And everyone was starving. So Makunaima cut down the tree so that life could continue, fulfilling, according to legend, his role of leadership and heroism in favor of everyone.

The story begins when Makunaima cuts the great tree, a long time ago, and this cut results in Mount Roraima, located in South America on the Brazil-Venezuela-Guyana Triple Border. For Borges (2017, p.11) “Mount Roraima is considered a sacred place by the indigenous people who live in its surroundings, who recognize it as the cut trunk of the Tree of all fruits – Wazaká – and “it has for the Pemón indigenous people of Venezuela and Macuxi of Brazil great spiritual significance, being referred to respectively as the mother of all waters and the house of Macunaima” (Reis, 2006, p. 5).

In this work by Jaider Esbell called Wazak'a, the tree of all fruits presents, in a colorful and animated way, the image of visual elements of fauna and flora cohabiting in full harmony, illustrating an imaginary scenario of what nature would be like without the devastating action of invaders in indigenous lands. Observing the work we see that he does not expose the human figure with the representation of indigenous images or invaders, this leads us to imagine what the life of animals around indigenous communities would be like without the presence of invaders.

A ilustração, por ser uma linguagem internacional, pode ser compreendida por qualquer povo. E é, sobretudo, uma forma de comunicação estética. A imagem confere ao livro, além do valor estético, o apoio. A pausa e a oportunidade de devaneio, tão importante na leitura criadora, resultado da percepção única e individual, que faz com que uma pessoa nunca descreva o que lê exatamente como outra (Sandroni,1999, p.28).

For Sandroni, illustration is a type of universal communication that can be displayed in various formats, for example, in works of art or illustrating books. Depending on the cultural contexts, they may resemble communities, regions or countries. When cultural boundaries are crossed and values are confronted, these pluralities come together and form new identities, this cultural phenomenon is called interculture. The author emphasizes that these interpretations are unique, although the themes are part of a collective, the interpretations will be individualized, leading to conclusions for different descriptions. Jaider Esbell demonstrated his visual knowledge, using colors to illustrate the joy and energy that nature transmits to us when its elements are in constant tune with life. The animals illustrated by Jaider in the work *Wazaká*, in addition to serving as an essential source of survival in the nutrition of indigenous communities, are also responsible for sowing seeds to other places in nature, thus allowing there to be no shortage of fruit in the forest. The different fully functioning environments (ecosystem) in each region contribute to the formation and maintenance of the food chain between species, including many that are facing extinction due to the uncontrolled action of capitalism on indigenous people and their cultures, regardless of the region inhabited.

Still in the work *Wazaká*, Jaider Esbell highlighted the species of monkeys, anteaters, ocelots, tortoises, deer and armadillos which are some of the species found in the indigenous lands of Brazil, in Roraima and in the countries that encompass the Amazon region. In his works Esbell also brought the story of the canaimé, which according to him for the Makuxi people, the figure of the canaimé acts to control the rules of coexistence in communities, interfering in situations of non-compliance with these rules or when people are vulnerable in inappropriate places.

Seria uma lei comunitária, uma lei entre sociedades. Então o canaimé é um pouco de tudo isso. Uma das formas mais relatadas é que ele aparece vestido de pele de animais, grandes ou pequenos, enfim, é uma composição de adereços que artisticamente é muito interessante (Esbell, 2018, p.18).

According to the artist, the figure of Canaimé<sup>7</sup> feared by indigenous people of all ethnicities, exists, however, it is only activated when something is wrong, when someone breaks the rules, fishes in prohibited places, hunts more animals than necessary to eat, invades the territory of another tribe. Ultimately, Canaimé is not a figure of evil per se, but rather a being that, in Jaider Esbell's view, collaborates in education and compliance with the norms and rules of each indigenous community. According to him, punishments can range from a severe beating that causes fever and body pain for several days, or even in cases of very serious infractions, they can drive Canaimé into a rage and punish the offender with death.

Esbell presented in his works messages themes that provoke different reflections in people, when he created works in the form of criticism showing the problems or when he praised the beauties with exuberant works of the region, the two forms of artistic expressions support resistance in favor of the culture of its people, whether this criticism is in the form of a visual or literary composition. When choosing their themes, these ideals always moved towards the activist side. These forms of expression transmit messages, talk about mythology, knowledge, violent episodes against indigenous peoples, in short, their creations were aimed at political articulation on fundamental issues of indigenous communities.

For Canclini (2019), Art can be represented in a cultured and popular way at the same time, as there are artists who are able to establish good relationships by representing Art both in literature and in visual form while at the same time establishing connection to social demands,

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<sup>7</sup> Canaimé em Roraima lenda que os indígenas ressaltam como o que faz o mal. O Canaimé pode ser qualquer um de dentro da comunidade, mas geralmente ele ataca outras comunidades.



Mas também existem artistas representativos do que denominados o terceiro tipo de resposta às exigências de reestruturação. São os que prosseguem sua carreira simultaneamente, sem excessivos conflitos, no campo culto e no popular-massivo (Canclini, 2019, p.361).

Still according to Canclini (2019, p.102), “there is an “attempt to return to the origins” , to a community in which the hierarchies were not of a socioeconomic order, but of a traditional or spiritual one” . By “returning to his origins” , as Canclini (2019) suggests, Esbell brings to him the possibility of preserving his memory while strengthening his identity and encountering his indigenous Makuxi culture. There is a need to observe how this behavior influences their performing and literary artistic works, prevailing the representation and characteristics of the identity rooted in this local culture, including other ethnicities as well.

Hommi Bhabha in the book “The Place of Culture” (Bhabha, 1998) presents his theory on cultural hybridism, standing out as one of the greatest thinkers in post-colonial studies in contemporary times. For the author,

Os termos do embate cultural, seja através de antagonismo ou afiliação, são produzidos performativamente. A representação da diferença não deve ser lida apressadamente como o reflexo de traços culturais ou étnicos preestabelecidos, inscritos na lapide fixa da tradição. A articulação social da diferença, da perspectiva da minoria, e uma negociação complexa, em andamento, que procura conferir autoridade aos hibridismos culturais que emergem em momentos de transformação histórica (Bhabha, 1998, p.21).

According to Bhabha, culture at the point of its identity construction comes through its own social performances constructed from questions of significance, where the historical experiences of cultural connection, of the autonomy of individual consciousness, must be aligned with social articulations. Jaider Esbell's education was built on relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, therefore, there is a miscegenation in his original identity, adding values from everyday life. In the words of Esbell (2018), this mixture was due to the experience of a northeastern education with coronelist heritage and a previous experience focused on the traditional people of the Makuxi ethnic group of their community. According to the artist, the construction of his own identity took place through the way in which the indigenous issue has been treated and articulated, on the one hand politically and on the other forgotten, going through various conflicts over time (Esbell, 2018).

E isso tudo foi importante para a construção posterior do meu trabalho, da minha identidade artística, da minha identidade poética, da minha identidade de pensador. Porque essa identidade vem dessa trajetória de luta, de movimento, de conquista (Esbell, 2018, p.25).

The Makuxi culture, as well as those of other ethnicities, faced conflicts over the demarcation of their lands, which were and still are exploited by a centralized policy and dominant colonizers. In this way, we know the essence and existence of orality that transmits traditional knowledge from generation to generation in indigenous communities, demonstrating the strength and courage of an indigenous culture.

The interaction of artist Jaider Esbell challenges us to understand the meanings he attributes to his paintings, performative and literary actions, all this identity comes from a cultural context that determines to understand the logic of organization and thought where his art is recognized and defended as contemporary art.

### **FINAL PUFF**

The intercultural process present in his work can show us ways to think about art teaching. Jaider Esbell's works are always connected when it comes to this representation dedicated to memory and his indigenous experience. As the artist himself states “[...] this identity comes from this trajectory of struggle, movement, conquest” Esbell (2018, p.25). For a long time and until today, indigenous people have been forgotten and suffered violence by dominant society. Their values were left aside, currently these people still deal with conflicting issues, such as illegal mining activities that cause water contamination, deforestation of forests, diseases, and the extermination of indigenous peoples. In this context, Esbell fits in as an activist artist defending indigenous causes. One of his main actions was to draw society's attention by criticizing the dominant system.

The artist's works provide knowledge and criticism, connecting with the elements of the nature of indigenous culture, beliefs, stories, dances, customs and the daily life of his culture and his collective. However, the intercultural weaves in Jaider Esbell's works are a main source of learning, as his productions are not abstract arts, they are related to cultural references and their representations, taking them as a basis. His artwork presents the cosmology of his people. His art is always a referential art loaded with symbolic elements that bring a little rock art and graphics, but it refers to Contemporary Indigenous Art (AIC), and the issue of a larger and complex history where it has the function of arousing people's interest. for the cosmologies of indigenous peoples. This makes Esbell's work a point of connection between indigenous and non-indigenous culture. Jaider Esbell presented in his art a didactic that provided a new form of cultural expression for his people, seeking, according to him, to maintain their authenticity and, with his representations, to connect and dialogue with others.

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