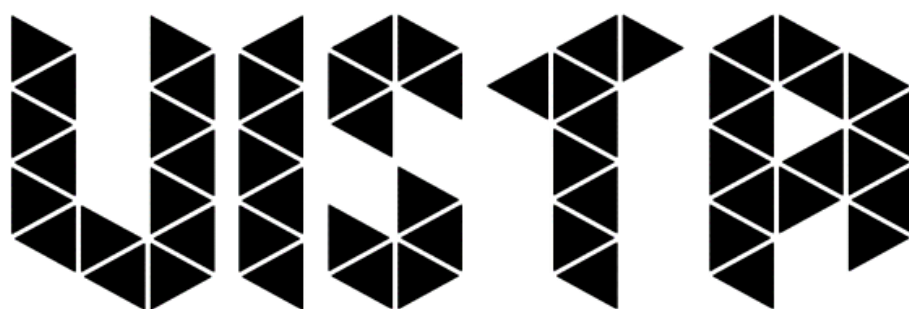




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Poetics, Imaginaries, and Decolonial *Aesthesis*: Iconographies of Resistance in Design and the Visual Culture of the Global South

Poéticas, Imaginários e a *Aesthesis* Decolonial:
Iconografias de Resistência no Design e na Cultura Visual
do Sul Global

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POETICS, IMAGINARIES, AND DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS: ICONOGRAPHIES OF RESISTANCE IN DESIGN AND THE VISUAL CULTURE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how visual languages and design practices serve as tools of epistemic resistance to Eurocentric hegemony, proposing a rupture with the continental and linear thinking of modernity. Drawing upon archipelagic thinking, rooted in Afro-diasporic philosophies, the study advocates multiplicity, subjectivity, and the pluriverse as fundamental critical alternatives. The theoretical framework is grounded in the debate over the three dimensions of coloniality — power, knowledge, and being — and draws on the work of Global South intellectuals such as Aníbal Quijano, Bispo dos Santos, and Ailton Krenak to substantiate the concepts of “decoloniality” and “counter-coloniality”. From this perspective, interculturality and confluence emerge as genuine forms of ontological resistance that recover subalternised knowledges and re-establish an integrated ecological relationship with nature. Within the field of visual culture, the article reconstructs *aesthesis*, mediated through Katya Mandoki’s micro-aesthetics and Paes Loureiro’s semiotic conversion, demonstrating that aesthetic expression arises directly from everyday lived experience and from mythopoetics embedded within the territory itself. On this basis, the article undertakes an iconographic analysis of the work of three contemporary artists: Harmonia Rosales, who subverts the Renaissance canon by placing Black deities at its centre; Mael Anhangá, who depicts the mystical symbiosis between the *caboclo* identity and the Amazon basin; and Daiara Tukano, who draws upon ancestral graphic traditions and cosmologies to affirm the sovereignty of the Earth. It is concluded that these visual manifestations converge towards the so-called “design of the margins” and towards multilateral visualities. By rejecting the purported neutrality and universality of modern industrial standards, the article redefines the role of the designer as an epistemic nomad, capable of traversing interdisciplinary and geographical boundaries to transform iconography into political symbols of re-existence, thereby opening unprecedented pathways for legitimising the knowing/being/doing of Indigenous and Afro-diasporic communities.

KEYWORDS

decolonial aesthesis, Global South, counter-coloniality, design, visual culture

POÉTICAS, IMAGINÁRIOS E A *AESTHESIS* DECOLONIAL: ICONOGRAFIAS DE RESISTÊNCIA NO DESIGN E NA CULTURA VISUAL DO SUL GLOBAL

RESUMO

O presente trabalho conduz um debate acerca de como as linguagens visuais e as práticas de projeto se configuram como ferramentas de resistência epistêmica frente à hegemonia eurocêntrica, propondo uma ruptura com o pensamento continental e linear da modernidade. Adotando o pensamento em arquipélagos, oriundo das filosofias afrodiaspóricas, o estudo defende a multiplicidade, a subjetividade e o pluriverso como alternativas críticas fundamentais. A fundamentação teórica ancora-se no debate sobre as três dimensões da colonialidade (do poder, do saber e do ser), mobilizando o pensamento de intelectuais do Sul Global, como Aníbal Quijano, Bispo dos Santos e Ailton Krenak, para legitimar os conceitos de “decolonialidade” e “contracolonialidade”. A partir desta perspectiva, a interculturalidade e a confluência surgem como autênticas formas de resistência ontológica que resgatam saberes subalternizados e restabelecem uma relação ecológica e integrada com a natureza. No âmbito da cultura visual, opera-se uma reconstituição da *aesthesis*, mediada pela microestética de Katya Mandoki e pela conversão semiótica de Paes Loureiro, demonstrando que a expressão estética emana diretamente de vivências cotidianas e de mitopoéticas que atravessam o próprio território. Sob esta premissa, empreende-se uma análise iconográfica das produções de três artistas contemporâneos: Harmonia Rosales, que subverte o cânone renascentista ao centralizar divindades negras; Mael Anhangá, que ilustra a simbiose mística entre o ser caboclo e a bacia amazônica; e Daiara Tukano, que recorre a grafismos e cosmologias ancestrais para afirmar a soberania da Terra. Conclui-se que estas manifestações visuais convergem para o chamado “design das bordas” e para as visualidades multilaterais. Ao rejeitar a pretensa neutralidade e a universalidade dos padrões industriais modernos, o artigo redefine o papel do designer como um nômade epistêmico, capaz de transitar por fronteiras interdisciplinares e geográficas para converter a iconografia em símbolos políticos de reexistência, abrindo caminhos inéditos de legitimação para o saber/ser/fazer de comunidades originárias e afrodiaspóricas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

aesthesis decolonial, Sul Global, contracolonialidade, design, cultura visual

INTRODUCTION: THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE IMAGINARY AND THE CRISIS OF CONTINENTAL THINKING

The concepts of “poetics” and “imaginaries” refer to worldviews and alternative forms of knowledge that shape distinct realities. These deeply interconnected notions prefigure how individuals and societies understand and perceive their environments, particularly within social and cultural contexts. In this context, “poetics” and “imaginaries” are convergent concepts that indicate a cultural understanding of social structures and collective self-perception (Paes Loureiro, 2015).

This philosophy represents a rupture with conventional modes of perception. By shifting focus away from the Eurocentric canon, archipelagic thinking, derived from Afro-diasporic philosophies, is encountered (Santos & Oliveira, 2019). This perspective

proposes that thought is shaped by multiple archipelagos, in opposition to the continental thinking of coloniality, which is characterised by unitary thought.

According to Santos and Oliveira (2019), thinking from the archipelago makes possible the multiplicity and pluriversity of the relationships between being and the world. This premise evokes a symbiotic relationship between poetics and imaginaries, given that they prefigure how the interrelationships between human beings and the world are shaped and expressed through the archipelago of the imaginary (Paes Loureiro, 2015; Santos & Oliveira, 2019).

The archipelagos of the imaginary are thus characterised as spaces of resistance that reject the continental monocolonality while embracing the multiple rhizomes of plural philosophies (Melo et al., 2021; Santos & Oliveira, 2019). As such, they are mobilised through contrasts — and it is through these contrasts that we perceive the pluriversal vision that characterises the *Tout-Monde*.

Archipelagic thinking initiates a crisis of continental thinking because, in forming an archipelago of the imaginary — characterised by a constellation of islands constituting a collective memory — it establishes the counter-coloniality of knowing-being and returns to the *aesthesis* that originates in human subjectivity and lived experience of the external world (Mandoki, 2013; Mignolo, 2000/2020). In this context, the field of art emerges through the production and reception of meanings (Fogliano, 2015). The former refers to the artwork's genesis and the artist's process of perceiving the nuances of their environment — their particular imaginary. The latter encompasses the meanings derived from perception and how these are shaped over time.

DECOLONIALITY AND COUNTER-COLONIALITY

As we begin to engage with these bodies of literature, we encounter the convergences between the concepts emerging from decolonial and postcolonial perspectives. These debates shape a symbiotic process of foregrounding the Global South and its worldviews. In doing so, we engage with the bodies of thought that have taken shape in the Americas, particularly in Latin America. Following the Iberian invasion of the continent by the Portuguese and the Spanish, a crossroads of lived experiences and mythologies emerged, along with alternative ways of understanding the world and its distinctive characteristics. It is within this context that we introduce the key concepts emerging from Global South scholarship, drawing on the debates initiated by Aníbal Quijano in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and subsequently developed by a range of scholars. Together, these contributions open up a dialogue aimed at breaking the epistemic bonds of Eurocentrism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2016; Quijano, 2024).

Building on the concept of “coloniality”, we examine the epistemic shifts emerging from the Global South. Quijano (2024) argues that coloniality can be understood as the logic of domination and exploitation that arose with the invasion of the Americas, emerging through processes of acculturation, the myth of modernity, and the domination of social spheres (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Coloniality is therefore not merely a

legacy of colonialism — deeply embedded in society — but rather a pattern of power that emerged through modern colonialism, capitalism, and mercantilism.

Although colonialism preceded coloniality, coloniality survives colonialism. Whereas colonialism is a system that sustains the colony's political and economic relationship with the coloniser, coloniality operates at a deeper level. It constitutes a system of beliefs and behaviours embedded in the imaginary of those who were colonised (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2024).

It is in this sense that Maldonado-Torres (2016) conceptualises “coloniality” through a threefold framework: (a) the coloniality of power, referring to the forms of control governing relationships of exploitation and domination; (b) the coloniality of knowledge, concerning the production of knowledge, the domination of epistemologies, and the production and reproduction of colonial modes of thought; and (c) the coloniality of being, the most profound dimension of coloniality, which foregrounds the lived experience of colonisation and its impact on ways of speaking, thinking, and acting. In other words, it refers to colonisation as experienced by colonised subjects and reveals the effects of coloniality at the most intimate level of being.

DECOLONIALITY, COUNTER-COLONIALITY, AND EPISTEMIC SHIFTS

As they emerge from the margins, decolonial philosophies seek to articulate a direct critique of coloniality — through an epistemic and ontological struggle in which decolonial and counter-colonial perspectives endeavour to establish concepts that challenge universalism and reject the imposition of a single worldview. In doing so, they advocate the recognition of subalternised knowledges, making visible Indigenous, African, *caboclo*, and other non-Europeanised cultures and practices (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Krenak, 2023).

Building on this premise, these strands of thought point to the need to decolonise minds through the lens of critical decoloniality, that is, through a reorientation of thinking. According to Thiong'o (1986/2015), such a reorientation begins with the “search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe” (p. 212). This process seeks to re-establish a connection with a people's intellectual, cultural, and identity traditions by rejecting the cruel and enduring effects of colonialism, thereby reaffirming their identities, knowledges, languages, and ways of life (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Thiong'o, 1986/2015).

Continuing this reflection, Walsh (2019) proposes the concept of “interculturality”, grounded in an understanding of “other” ways of thinking and positioning oneself, thereby foregrounding colonial difference. In this sense, the author advances an epistemology that goes beyond the mere coexistence of different cultures by proposing a social project to transform structures of power and knowledge, with a focus on decolonisation and the construction of more just and equitable relationships. In doing so, it subverts colonial modes of thought that reject the plurality of beings and whose hegemonic logic sustains a single-lens view of the world.

Consequently, adopting an anti-systemic stance towards neoliberal thought points towards a practice of liberation and of valuing plural cultures and their ways of seeing/being-in-the-world, grounded in the imaginaries of Indigenous peoples — thereby affirming forms of knowledge invalidated by colonialism (Krenak, 2021). In this regard, by bringing into dialogue “other” knowledges and modes of thought, we reconstruct the world through a new, non-exclusionary mode of thought, one that fosters self-awareness, action towards existence, individual and collective humanisation, and liberation, while cultivating “other” ways of being, living, and knowing (Bispo dos Santos, 2015; Walsh, 2019).

These emerging practices therefore point towards an approach grounded in counter-coloniality. This approach is characterised by a call to decolonise human modes of thought and ways of seeing/living in the world. Krenak (2022) presents the idea that “life is wild” as a call for an epistemological rebellion, inviting us to challenge the assumption that civilisations are inherently urban and that everything beyond the city is primitive and/or barbaric, and therefore expendable.

This perspective demonstrates how the colonial mindset perpetuates a disconnection from other ways of existing and living in relation with nature, giving rise to a forgotten poetics. It thus invites us to question the hegemonic conception of “humanity”. Humanity is portrayed as an exclusive club reserved for those who devastate the planet in the service of capital, treating other beings — and even other human beings — as “sub-humanity”. In this way, a civilisational abstraction emerges that suppresses diversity and denies the plurality of forms of life (Krenak, 2021, 2022).

In this regard, the philosophies of Indigenous peoples open a dialogue about reconnecting with nature and a worldview that conceives the planet as a living organism. In Indigenous cosmologies, the Earth is regarded as a nurturing mother; however, under the veil of capitalism and its forms of oppression, it is instead viewed as an inexhaustible source of resources, stripping rivers, forests, and mountains of their personhood (Krenak, 2020, 2021).

Furthermore, counter-coloniality constitutes both a way of life and an active movement of resistance against these exclusions produced by coloniality. Bispo dos Santos (2023) presents conceptual tools that articulate a subversion of colonial realities through the “bewitchment of language” and the use of “germinating words” (p. 4). In this sense, naming is a form of power, and coloniality has employed this sphere of domination to fracture identities and to “reify” peoples, bodies, and cultures.

This philosophy invites us to reclaim the idea of making “the coloniser’s weapons our own”, sowing words that “the Euro-colonisers themselves do not dare to utter” (Bispo dos Santos, 2023, p. 4). In doing so, we can transform minds into cultivated fields, into which we cast a gourd full of seeds that are transmuted into shoots, transforming what was not ours into seeds that germinate into who we are.

In this way, we are introduced to transfluence as a movement of transformation and circularity in nature, in which society is likened to water that evaporates and returns as rain (Bispo dos Santos, 2015). Through transfluence, we are beginning, middle, and (re)beginning. We are, therefore, confluent beings.

Confluence is the force that propels sharing, recognition, and respect. Within it, the river that constitutes society does not cease to be the same river because it “flows together with another river; on the contrary, it becomes itself and other rivers — it grows stronger” (Bispo dos Santos, 2023, p. 5). When society enters into confluence, it becomes a plural being, without abandoning its roots and identities, but instead forming an intercultural society in which we become “people within other people”.

Counter-coloniality is therefore intrinsically linked to the reclaiming, revalidation, and re-existence of Indigenous cultures. Only by affirming ancestral knowledges, practices, and worldviews can we acquire the driving force needed to overcome the colonial legacy and build a different future.

From this perspective, the cultures of the margins emerge as important sites of subversion, where cultural and spiritual manifestations — such as dances, songs, rituals, and celebrations — function as forms of resistance that strengthen communities and resist the fragmentation imposed by modernity/coloniality (Santos, 2024).

The concepts of “confluence” and “transfluence”, proposed by Bispo dos Santos (Nego Bispo), are not merely epistemologies but descriptions of the traditional ways of life of *quilombola* and Indigenous peoples, who have always maintained an ecological and respectful relationship with all beings and elements of nature — embodying concrete expressions and practices of a worldview that counter-coloniality seeks to reactivate and defend against the monoculture and exploitation of capitalism.

Accordingly, counter-coloniality celebrates the plurality and diversity of ways of life and modes of thought, in opposition to the homogenisation imposed by civilisation. The reclaiming of Indigenous cultures entails recognising that “we are not the same, and it is wonderful to know that each of us (...) is different from the other, like constellations” (Krenak, 2022, p. 18).

RECONSTITUTING AESTHESIS: ICONOGRAPHY AS A PRACTICE OF (RE)EXISTENCE

Visual archetypes underpin the aesthetic and perceptual experience of being, thereby shaping *aesthesis*¹. This is exemplified by Indigenous body painting and its representations. For an Indigenous child, the representation of a pregnant woman is expressed through a specific graphic pattern that she will wear throughout her pregnancy; for a Western individual, this is not the case (Paes Loureiro, 2024).

Accordingly, we understand iconography not merely as the description of images, but as an operative component of visual language. Through iconographic representation, human beings reconstruct a new mode of thought, transforming themselves through a new process of writing (Wagner, 2024). Iconography thus offers new ways of (re)interpreting the imaginaries of communication, art, and culture, while subverting written reality through the imaginary and its poetics.

Mandoki (2007) argues that aesthetic expression emerges from the reality and the territory in which human beings are situated. Aesthetics is therefore an integral component of a culture’s visual and cultural expressions and its imaginaries. From a decolonial

¹ From the Greek: the ability to feel and perceive the world through the senses, forming the basis of aesthetic experience.

perspective, visual language is expressed through works that explicitly engage with art's role in society. Characterised by practices that are not confined to a Europeanised representations of the world and its worldviews, visual allegories are transformed into manifestations that reconfigure the world through a sensitive lens, addressing social justice while sustaining art as a form of expression that is not merely individual but also a political act of power and of legitimising non-colonialist worldviews (Paiva, 2022).

Only when artists from the margins communicate their cultures through art does non-Western art attain legitimacy (Paiva, 2022; Sales, 2021). Building on this premise, Mandoki (2013) proposes a radical shift in the way we understand aesthetics. Rather than conceiving it solely in relation to the six classical art forms (painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance, and architecture), she introduces the concept of “micro-aesthetics”², which may be understood as an “expanded field of aesthetics”³. As she herself argues, this entails an “art-centred aesthetics”, one that breaks with the Kantian and Hegelian paradigm that measures all that is aesthetic or artistic according to a Eurocentric — male, rationalist, elitist, and colonial — standard.

Accordingly, we are invited to recover the original roots of art as *aesthesis*, understood as a return to the sensitive and sensory perception at the core of artistic experience. Thus, the body, the senses, and everyday emotions, together with human relationships and their interactions with the territory, are permeated by aesthetic experiences that subsequently find expression in artistic creation (Mandoki, 2013). Aesthetics is therefore not confined to galleries and museums; it is embedded in the imaginaries of everyday life, expressed through a child's laughter, the sounds of the forest, the rhythm of popular prayers, the texture of fibres, ceramics and their graphic patterns, the singing of a *ponto* (chant), the body painting of Indigenous peoples, folk songs — in short, everything that can be felt by the body and perceived through the senses.

For us, therefore, iconography is an act of (re)imagining and (re)existing. The aesthetic dimension of being constitutes a reinterpretation of each individual's lived reality, grounded in their everyday aesthetic experience.

ALTERNATIVE VISUALITIES AND SEMIOTIC CONVERSION

Building on the concept of “micro-aesthetics”, the waters of the Amazon possess a language of their own — one that emerges from their own pedagogies and confluences. The river is therefore not merely a watercourse but a language that shapes the imaginaries

² The author introduces the need to broaden our understanding of this field through the concept of “micro-aesthetics”, drawing inspiration from the work of the philosopher and psychologist William James. This micro-aesthetics focuses on our “sensuously alive capacity”, in which every particle contributes to the “pulsations of feeling” (Mandoki, 2013, p. 17). Rather than focusing on the great artistic geniuses, the aesthetic compass proposed by Katya Mandoki (2013) directs our attention to the “small details” of everyday life. Sensibility is thus constituted through the minimal, vital, and sensory responses of human beings to their environment.

³ By expanding the field of aesthetics, Mandoki (2013) argues that it encompasses the sensory “small details” that shape everyday life, dissolving the classical dichotomies between culture and nature, body and mind, and beauty and utility. In doing so, she conceives sensibility as a biological and cultural *continuum*, thereby moving beyond the Kantian and Hegelian tradition.

of the peoples who inhabit it. It functions as a matrix of meaning for Amazonian being, expressed through feelings of certainty and a sense of belonging to the territory. As Paes Loureiro (2024) observes, “a river does not exist alone”; it is a constituent being within a confluence of knowledges. It therefore carries within it an intertwining of voices and narratives, myths and poetics, affections and memories.

The fluidity of rivers is epistemic. The movement of the Amazon’s waters teaches its peoples through stories carried by the current, myths shared in communal gatherings, and entities that emerge from its banks, translating the invisible into the visible. In this way, the epistemology of Amazonian being is expressed through a profoundly allegorical form of knowledge that shapes a collective aesthetic unconscious, in which nature and culture are inseparable and communicate through living metaphors articulated by micro-aesthetics (Mandoki, 2013; Paes Loureiro, 2024). Within this framework, all the human senses become intertwined with the lived experience of the territory and are transformed into the region’s aesthetic expressions.

Accordingly, every sign is dual, multiple, and rhizomatic. The elements of the Amazon region — whether a stone, a fish, a *balaio* (woven basket), or a *cuia* (gourd bowl) — are imbued with meanings that intertwine practical function and aesthetic poetics, giving rise to a “semiotic conversion”⁴ (Paes Loureiro, 2007, 2024) that unfolds in layers: a boat is not merely a means of transport but also a sign of passage, a constituent element of the landscape, and a vehicle that carries life across the waters; a snake is not merely an animal but also a myth, a warning, and an enchantment; *tacacá* (Amazonian soup) is not merely a dish but a symbol of conviviality, sharing, and familiarity. These meanings vary according to territory, orality, mythopoetics, and each individual’s lived experience (Mandoki, 2013; Paes Loureiro, 2015).

Thus, the river — as a total sign — traverses and translates the Amazonian world through an experience of presence that is sensory, political, symbolic, and (re)imagined, shaping an aesthetic particular to Amazonian being.

Building on this premise, aesthetics engages with the mythopoetics specific to its own imaginary. From this perspective, we examine how artists from the Global South mobilise this iconography of resistance to create alternative visualities. To this end, we analyse works by Harmonia Rosales, Mael Anhangá, and Daiara Tukano.

Throughout her artistic practice, Harmonia Rosales foregrounds the Black imaginary, positioning Blackness at the centre of her reinterpretations and original works. Through her iconographic representations, the artist gives visual expression to Blackness by reinterpreting and reimagining Renaissance masterpieces in terms of African deities — as illustrated in the *O Nascimento de Oxum* (Birth of Oshun; Figure 1) and the *Creation of God* (Creation of God; Figure 2).

⁴ The concept of “semiotic conversion”, proposed by Paes Loureiro (2007), is defined as the process through which objects or cultural phenomena move from one cultural context to another, thereby bringing about a transformation in the quality and meaning of the sign. This transfiguration occurs through a perceptible reordering of the hierarchy of the functions inherent in the object (such as its practical, theoretical, magical-religious, and aesthetic functions). During this process of contextual displacement or inversion, the functions embodied in the object are dialectically reordered under the guidance of a new dominant function.



Figure 1. O Nascimento de Oxum (*The Birth of Oshun*; oil on canvas)
Credits. Harmonia Rosales, 2017. (<https://www.harmoniarosales.art/catalogue/birth-of-oshun>)



Figure 2. Criação de Deus (*The Creation of God*; oil on canvas)
Credits. Harmonia Rosales, 2017. (<https://www.harmoniarosales.art/catalogue/creation-of-god>)

The artist's exhibitions directly challenge the traditional art establishment. In her first solo exhibition, *Black Imaginary to Counter Hegemon — BICTH*, her works pose the following question: why have we accepted Eurocentric perceptions of beauty and historical narratives for so long? Similarly, in *New World Consciousness*, Rosales brings these concerns into galleries and exhibition spaces worldwide, challenging the hegemonic White practices that structure these institutions. In doing so, her work performs a visual ethnography through forms of resistance that bring to light new consciousnesses regarding class, race, and gender — shaped by oppression and giving rise to a distinct aesthetic. The artist's choices in visual and iconographic representation shape both the perception of her works and the scholarship surrounding them; they are therefore far from neutral — they actively shape realities.

In the painting above (Figure 1), a reinterpretation of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1483–1485), Rosales foregrounds an iconography rooted in the Black imaginary, challenging Eurocentric ideals of beauty. In doing so, the work creates a space for Black female empowerment and affirms beauty in all its forms, redirecting the Eurocentric frame to forge a counter-hegemonic visual language.

In this work, the artist draws upon one of the *itans* (from Yoruba: story, tale, or narrative) of Oshun, in which the Orixá crosses the desert, transforms into a peacock, and flies to Olodumare to plead for abundant rain during a devastating drought. This gesture constitutes an act of epistemic resistance, through which the artist projects a narrative that not only displaces the canon of European art but also inscribes a Black, female, and sacred body within it, thereby enacting world-making through reinvention.

It is within this framework that the work becomes part of a counter-colonial aesthetic. Rather than merely seeking Black representation, it re-enchants signs and their meanings by reinscribing the poetics of Afro-diasporic worldviews within them. It thus constitutes a visual language that affirms both epistemic resistance and the reinvention of worlds. In this way, we observe the confluences generated by the African diaspora and the intersections that have shaped the plural societies of the Americas, where *itans* and *orikis*, brought from Africa, merge with European art.

In the *Criação de Deus* (Figure 2), Rosales subverts Michelangelo's celebrated fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. The image invokes the sacred through the earth, shifting the divine axis from the White, patriarchal vault of the West to the fertile Black womb of Nanã. By reimagining Michelangelo's fresco, the artist disrupts the Christian genealogy of creation, illuminating a new cosmogony through the lens of Black ancestry, in which clay precedes all else and Black femininity becomes the creative principle. Eve thus emerges as Black and earth-coloured — not as the transgressor who precipitates original sin, but as the origin itself — fashioned from living clay, moulded by the breath of Oxalá and grounded in the wisdom of Nanã. The landscape surrounding this newly formed body is not a flowering garden but the territory of red earth — the same earth that colours the body of the first woman and that has sustained African knowledges for millennia.

Through this pictorial gesture, the artist echoes the idea that all life pulses forth from Africa and that the Black body is both the image and the origin of creation. In the artist's words, "when you consider that all human life came out of Africa, the Garden of Eden and all, then it only makes sense to paint God as a Black woman, sparking life in her own image" (Rosales, 2017, para. 1).

The works of Mael Anhangá (Figure 3 and Figure 4) translate the poetics of the Amazonian imaginary by evoking myths and legends interwoven with human perception.



Figure 3. Cobra-Grande (*Great Serpent*; illustration)
Credits. Mael Anhangá, 2021. (<https://www.maelanhanga.com/cobra-grande>)



Figure 4. Anfibios (*Amphibians; ilustração*)

Credits. Mael Anhangá, 2021. (<https://www.maelanhanga.com/anfibios>)

In *Cobra-Grande* (Great Serpent; Figure 3), we see the aesthetic representation of a being unique to the Amazon. Through this illustration, the artist foregrounds the significance of the waters, which are intrinsically linked to the region's myths. We see the Amazonian *caboclo* in symbiosis with nature: the river, the fish, and the great serpent, a mythical being of the region's popular imagination.

In doing so, Anhangá portrays an imaginary imbued with profound meanings that express both the territory's identity and its connection to nature. The image foregrounds the confluence of knowing and being.

In *Anfibios* (Amphibians; Figure 4), the artist depicts Tapajó ceramics in relation to being and the waters of the territory. In this illustration, Anhangá presents an interaction between the rivers and the imaginary, in which the rivers are more than routes of transportation for the peoples of the Amazon; they become symbols of the connection between this world and the spiritual realm.

The interaction between human beings and the waters — through the cycles of flood and ebb — shapes the relations that constitute the imaginary and reflects the worldview of these peoples, for whom rivers are not merely sources of sustenance but living and sacred entities that are integral to the Amazon's cultural identity.

In this way, as we enter the field of art, we perceive how different aesthetics and symbolic systems can express an imaginary. Iconography thus constitutes an act that denaturalises established norms, whether Western or otherwise. Imaginaries, therefore, operate within the observer's emotional and sensory experience, which helps explain why works of art can evoke such profound emotional responses.

Finally, we observe decoloniality and Indigenous representation in the works of the Indigenous artist Daiara Tukano (Figure 5 and Figure 6), an activist who dedicates her practice to promoting the visibility of Indigenous peoples and advocating for their rights. Through saturated colours, graphic patterns and motifs, and mythopoetics, her works articulate a visual language rooted in the Indigenous imaginary. These elements reveal a distinctive aesthetic orientation and, consequently, a particular way of expressing her artistic self.



Figure 5. *A Redenção (Redemption; acrylic on canvas, 1 x 1 m, Nhe'e Porã exhibition, Museum of the Portuguese Language)*
Credits. Daiara Tukano, 2022. (<https://www.amazonialatitude.com/2022/12/13/a-vida-e-selvagem/>)



Figure 6. *A Queda do Céu e a Mãe de Todas as Lutas (The Fall of the Sky and the Mother of All Struggles; acrylic on canvas, 2 x 4 m, currently on display at the Palácio do Planalto in Brasília)*
Credits. Daiara Tukano, 2022. (<https://almeidaedale.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/15960-a-queda-do-ceu-e-a-mae-de-todas-as-lutas-daiara-tukano.jpg>)

In *A Redenção* (Redemption; Figure 5), the artist stages a confrontation between the forest (the hunted being) and the human being (the hunter), distancing the viewer from imaginaries of a defenceless forest. By challenging this colonial imagery, she presents the forest as alive, vibrant, and psychedelic, transforming it into a mythical being that not only resists attacks and extractive colonisation but also strikes back against its aggressors, thereby reaffirming the place of Indigenous peoples in struggles for territory and in resistance to the neoliberal hegemony of exploitation. Consequently, the forest ecosystem as a whole emerges as an active agent defending both its territory and its bodies.

In *A Queda do Céu e a Mãe de Todas as Lutas* (The Fall of the Sky and the Mother of All Struggles; Figure 6), the artist presents a composition that draws the viewer's gaze towards a woman holding a male body — a composition that recalls the traditional iconography of the *Pietà*, depicting the Virgin Mary holding the dead Christ. Viewed through the cosmologies of the Tukano people, however, the scene becomes an Indigenous, spiritual reinterpretation in which Western religious symbols are replaced by elements of nature. As we contemplate the prominence of the natural world — represented by the almost symmetrical jaguars and the great yellow serpent winding through pink branches and blue and green foliage — we encounter a dense and vibrant environment. In many Indigenous cultures, jaguars are animals of power, symbolising strength, protection, and a connection with the sacred. The serpent, in turn, symbolises transformation, regeneration, and wisdom (Tukano et al., 2025).

We also observe the cloak — or the red mountain — which may represent the Earth itself, that is, the “Mother” who shelters and sustains all beings. It is from this symbolism that the title of the work, *A Queda do Céu e a Mãe de Todas as Lutas*, derives, conveying both a critique and a call to action: environmental destruction (“the fall of the sky”) and the struggle for the land as the origin of all other social struggles (Veras, 2020).

According to the artist, the work pays tribute to the Earth as Mother, symbolising Indigenous peoples' love for nature (Tukano, 2023). The figure holding the body also represents the Earth caring for Life, or an Indigenous woman mourning her devastated land while simultaneously protecting it. The work therefore conveys the message that, in protecting the Earth, we are engaged not only in a political struggle but also in a spiritual, existential, and collective one.

THE DESIGN IN THE BORDERLANDS AND MULTILATERAL VISUALITIES

Having established a conceptual framework for the pluriverse and the visualities through which imaginaries are expressed, we now turn to the place of design within this discussion. We understand design not as a neutral practice but as an ontological field in which different worldviews are contested. If modernity/coloniality has imposed a universalist practice grounded in European industrial efficiency and a sanitised aesthetic that disregards territory, we instead propose an approach informed by what Fry (2014) terms the “design in the borderlands”. The borderlands are not spaces of lack or subalternity but zones of intense vitality and emancipatory potential. It is in the borderlands, the

peripheries, and the borders that continental thinking fragments and gives way to archipelagic thought.

The design in the borderlands operates precisely within the fissures of the modern world-system. While the centre seeks homogenisation, the margins preserve the multiplicity of the poetics and imaginaries discussed earlier.

Designing from the borderlands requires designers to undertake both a geographical and a sensory displacement. It requires removing the Global North from its position as the sole compass and placing the Global South at the centre of the world. This movement is not merely a cartographic inversion; as Mignolo (2000/2020) argues, it constitutes a reconstitution of our capacity to feel, to be, and to think. It is an aesthetic perception — that is, an *aesthesis* — that refuses to be disciplined by the canons of the Bauhaus or the international style, seeking instead the multilateral visualities that emerge from the everyday lived experiences of Indigenous and Afro-diasporic peoples (Andrade, 2025; Batista & Carvalho, 2022).

Accordingly, we understand these multilateral visualities as the graphic and visual manifestation of this new decolonial/counter-colonial consciousness. They challenge the Eurocentric dogmas of universality because they do not seek a single solution to a design problem. Rather, multilateral visualities are dialogical: they recognise that every image, every graphic pattern, and every object carries the artistic and cultural repertoire of its interpreter (Borges, 2022; Mandoki, 2013).

By designing from this perspective, we create what we call a “space of being”. Within this space, the epistemologies of the Global South are not treated as folklore or primitive craft but as legitimate knowledge technologies that sow and take root as alternative ways of inhabiting the planet (Batista & Carvalho, 2022; Escobar, 2018).

Within this context, the designer’s role is transformed. We cease to be technicians reproducing capital and become epistemic nomads. The nomadic designer refuses the confines of a single discipline, moving across the boundaries between art, communication, and the territory that shapes them.

This nomadism enables us to enact the “semiotic conversion” proposed by Paes Loureiro (2015), transforming elements of our culture into icons of resistance. When we examine the work of Daiara Tukano or Mael Anhangá, it becomes clear that they are not merely “decorating” surfaces; they are *diseñando* (drawing/designing) worlds. They use iconography to subvert the discursive regimes that have historically classified their cultures as inferior.

For us, this design of the margins is inseparable from the figure of the “participant-relatives”, understood as all individuals and collectives marginalised by, or dissenting from, the Eurocentric order who help co-create the “South” or “Souths” through new ways of thinking (Borrero, 2020). Drawing on the discussions advanced by Batista and Carvalho (2022), we use this expression to refer to all those historically marginalised by the project of modernity: those deemed “primitive”, migrants, Black populations, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQIAPN+ communities, women, and Latin Americans. We — these “relatives” — embody a mode of designing that is intrinsically relational. Unlike

anthropocentric design — which regards nature as a resource to be exploited — the design of the margins understands territory as a living organism, like the river-entity in Anhangá's works or Nanã's fertile womb in Rosales's paintings.

Multilateral visualities therefore function as an archipelago of meanings. Each visual "island" retains its particularity, yet all are connected by the water — the lifeblood of decoloniality/counter-coloniality — that makes possible a relationship with the *Tout-Monde* (Galeano, 2021; Santos & Oliveira, 2019).

In creating iconography from the margins, we enact (re)existence. We subvert imagined reality through visual inscription and reclaim the right to define our own poetics. Design thus becomes a practice of liberating the senses, in which beauty is not an abstract standard but the outcome of an ethical encounter between the designer, their repertoire, and their territory.

We conclude that the design in the borderlands is not an alternative to "real design", but rather the very condition for the survival of cultures in the Global South. By embracing multiplicity and the tensions that emerge from these border zones, we are building a form of design that serves not merely consumption but the dignity of being. It is through this critical and sensitive stance that we can break the epistemic bonds of Eurocentrism and open pathways for future generations of designers to create from their own roots, transforming the archipelago of the imaginary into a powerful and undeniable visual reality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE HORIZON OF DECOLONIAL VISUALITIES AND THE POETICS OF (Re)EXISTENCE

Throughout this journey, we have sought to chart a cartography not intended to be definitive, but rather to serve as an invitation to archipelagic thought. We began from the premise that poetics and imaginaries are not merely cultural by-products but the very foundations of the worldviews that enable human beings to inhabit the world meaningfully. We argue that understanding images and design through the lens of decoloniality requires, above all, a rupture with continental thinking.

We reaffirm that the transition from classical aesthetics to decolonial aesthesis, as argued by Mignolo (2000/2020, 2011), is not merely an academic exercise but a vital imperative. When we look at the visualities of the Global South, we see not simply "forms" or "styles" but what we term "iconographies of resistance". As illustrated through the works of Harmonia Rosales, Daiara Tukano, and Mael Anhangá, these images function as dispositifs of (re)existence. They do not merely resist colonial erasure; they propose new ways of existing, grounded in ancestral memory, territory, and the sacredness of bodies that have historically been marginalised.

In this regard, the concept of the "design in the borderlands", which we have explored throughout this article and now fully integrate into our conclusion, emerges as a design response to the crisis of modern sensibility. Designing in the borderlands means recognising that the periphery is, in fact, a centre of production for powerful multilateral visualities. As we have argued, the borderlands are the spaces where semiotic conversion takes place with greatest intensity, enabling design to cease functioning as a tool for

reproducing capital and instead become a practice of care and visual sovereignty. For us, the designer who works from the borderlands understands that every line, every colour, and every symbol carries both political and ontological responsibility.

We believe that the future of visualities in the Global South lies in our ability to keep our archipelagos of the imaginary alive. This requires resisting the search for a single Latin American, Amazonian, Caribbean, or Brazilian style and instead embracing the connected fragmentation that the archipelago embodies. Each island of creation is linked by a sea of shared experiences of resistance to coloniality. It is through this relationship with the *Tout-Monde*, as discussed by Santos and Oliveira (2019), that we find the strength to denaturalise dominant ways of seeing and to decolonise the screen, the image, and the visual field.

Our analysis of iconology, drawing on Borges (2022) and Mandoki (2007, 2013), has shown that the interpretation of images is always a situated act. There is no “neutral” or “universal” reading of visual culture. We therefore argue that multilateral visualities offer a path towards a more ethical and plural design practice. Once we acknowledge that it is the interpreter’s artistic and cultural repertoire that brings the sign to life, we create space for the participant-relatives to become the protagonists of their own narratives. Viewed from this perspective, design becomes an extension of being itself — a space of being in which the epistemologies of the Global South can finally flourish free from the burden of Eurocentric judgement.

The works we have examined are not merely objects of study; they are visual manifestos. They teach us that creating iconography is fundamentally an act of (re)imagining the world through our own wounds and healing processes. Whether in Rosales’s subversion of the Renaissance through the re-enchantment of its imagery with Black deities, or in Tukano’s transformation of the agony of the *Pietà* into an urgent call for environmental preservation, what we witness is the triumph of *aesthesis* over colonial anaesthesia.

For the broader field of visual culture, we leave the following question: how can our educational institutions and museums embrace these visualities without domesticating them? We believe the answer lies in epistemic nomadism. We must be willing to abandon the certainties of established design disciplines and venture into the knowledges of the waters, the forests, the streets, and the crossroads. The South must become more than a place on the map; it must become a way of seeing and sensing the world that privileges life in all its manifestations.

We conclude by reaffirming that the path towards a genuinely decolonial visual language lies in valuing regional poetics and in having the courage to become the creators of our own canons. The archipelago is in motion. The waters of resistance are rising, and with them, a new multilateral visibility emerges from the margins towards the centre, transforming the aspiration to place the South at the centre of the world into a tangible, lived, and undeniable reality.

May design and art continue to serve as our instruments of (re)existence, and may our images forever remain the compasses of a world in which many worlds can coexist.

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