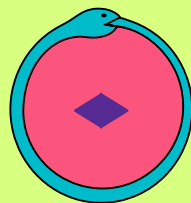
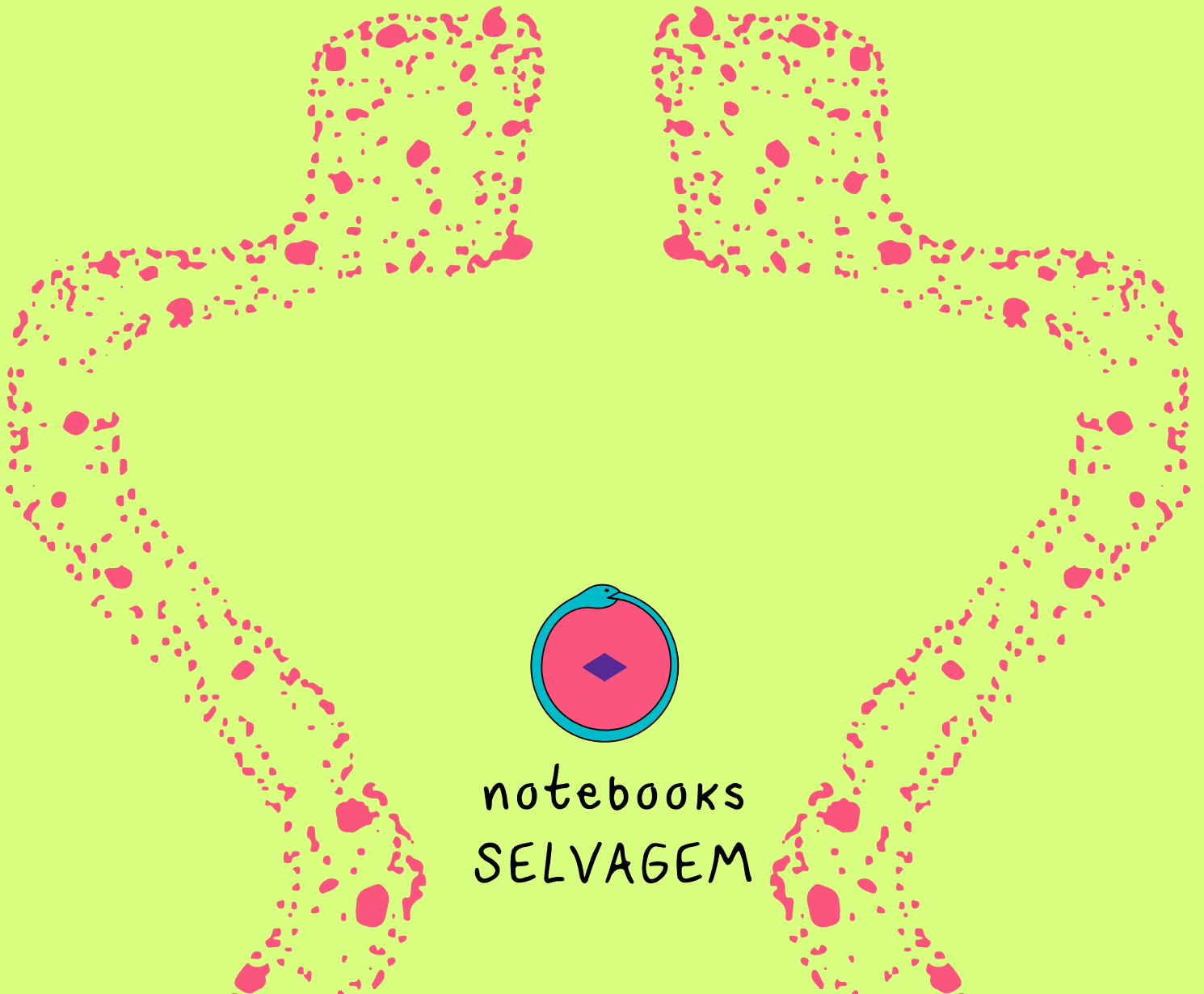


BEFORE THE KĒHÍRIPŌRĀ,
THE DRAWINGS OF DREAMS
DID NOT EXIST

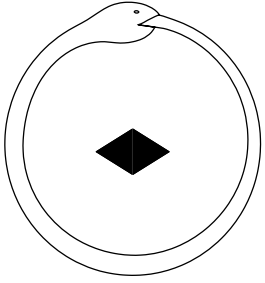
Denilson Baniwa

Reading Cycle *There was no world before*

3/4



notebooks
SELVAGEM



BEFORE THE KĒHÍRIPŌRĀ,
THE DRAWINGS OF DREAMS DID NOT EXIST

Denilson Baniwa

Reading Cycle of the book *There was no world before* 3 / 4

PRESENTATION

Idjahure Kadiwel

It is with great joy that we resume the publication of the meetings of the Reading Cycle *Antes o mundo não existia* [There was no world before], a book on *Desana* mythology by Firmiano Lana (*Umusi Pārōkumu*) and Luiz Lana (*Tōrāmũ Kēhíri*), which took place on 22 and 29 July 2020, and 5 and 12 August 2020, coordinated by Francy Baniwa and me. In this third meeting, we invited the artist Denilson Baniwa to share his vision about the paintings present in the book, based on the transits and experiments of his artistic work, alongside Francy herself, who also made an exhibition based on her anthropological research on the *Baniwa* people's creation narratives, emphasising the female perspective on these stories and complementing Denilson's presentation. At the end of the conversation, Denilson suggested that Anna Dantes publish Francy's dissertation. In this month of April 2023, almost three years after that meeting, comes to light *Umbigo do mundo* [World's navel], a book written by Francy Baniwa (*Hipamaalhe*) and her father Francisco Baniwa (*Matsaape*), which features more than 70 watercolour paintings by her brother Frank Baniwa (*Hipattairi*).

The endless layers present in the narratives, stories or myths of Rio Negro, were therefore analyzed from the perspective of two *Baniwa* indigenous thinkers, addressing the relationships between the visuality and the elements of the narrative — or of the 'geomythology', as called by Jaime Diakara in the first meeting of the series. In the broad Upper Rio Negro region, the *Baniwa* people are neighbors of the *Desana* and

Tukano and, although they are people from different linguistic families, with other traditions, they share many characteristics in their way of life, thinking and social organisation. In this edition, we focus on Denilson's participation and the way in which he develops his art under multiple aesthetics, based on Rio Negro narrative and pictographic traditions. Francy's rich speech, which she shared with her usual generosity about **Baniwa** feminine, cosmological, ritualistic, and agricultural knowledge, will certainly find a place in another publication after the launch of *Umbigo do mundo*.

At that time, I was editing the catalogue for the exhibition *Véxoa: Nós sabemos* [Véxoa: We know], curated by Naine Terena, held at Pinacoteca de São Paulo, between November 2020 and March 2021, to which Denilson contributed with an article in honour of Feliciano Lana, nephew of Firmiano Lana and cousin-brother of Luiz Lana, who passed away in May 2020. Due to the strength of his testimony, Denilson was invited to deepen the connection elaborated in his article, exploring the advent of visuality present in *Antes o mundo não existia* and its influence over his practice, which has been one of the most representative among this entire generation that has transformed contemporary indigenous art.

DENILSON BANIWA

I'm Denilson Baniwa, I'm a **Baniwa** from Rio Negro, I'm in Rio de Janeiro now, precisely in Niterói, where I live and work. I'm an artist in a very broad context, of moving visualities and some other things to a place of art where the indigenous body is present in different ways.

I met Feliciano in São Gabriel some time ago. We talked, and finally, we exchanged some ideas. I learned from him and in fact he is one of the great indigenous influences in my life, both in my artistic work, and in a way of thinking that today people call decolonial, but which in Rio Negro is a way of thinking that moved in another direction, and that today, comparing the two things, it seems to me to be very similar. I wrote this text called "Uma maloca-museu para Feliciano Lana, o filho

dos desenhos dos sonhos” [A maloca-museum for Feliciano Lana, the son of the drawings of dreams] which at first was a text to be published in English and not in Portuguese, in the project Cultures of Anti-racism in Latin America, from the University of Manchester, in Europe. Then a university in Argentina invited me to translate this text into Spanish and now Idjahure translated it from English into Portuguese for the Pinacoteca, for the catalogue of *Véxoa: nós sabemos*. So it’s a text that has been circulating a lot because it brings some reflections on Feliciano’s thinking, which has to do with the thinking of Firmiano and Luiz and also the thinking of other indigenous characters from Rio Negro, who are part of this entire movement of indigenous narrators, in a collection called *Narradores indígenas do Rio Negro* [Indigenous narrators of Rio Negro], where the original version by Lana was republished.

I was very happy about the invitation that Idjahure made me to be with you all and I was a little apprehensive because I’m not **Tukano** and I’m not **Desana**. I’m **Baniwa**, which is another indigenous people that has little in common with the story of the book. Although I know these stories a lot, because I know these people, these stories are not part of, let’s say, the pantheon of the **Baniwa**’s historical construction, but I am very interested in it and accepted the invitation because I could talk to you all about the visuality of this book. About the novelty brought by this book for us to understand this indigenous world of Rio Negro, this indigenous world of **Desana**, **Tukano**, **Pira-Tapuia**, **Baniwa**.

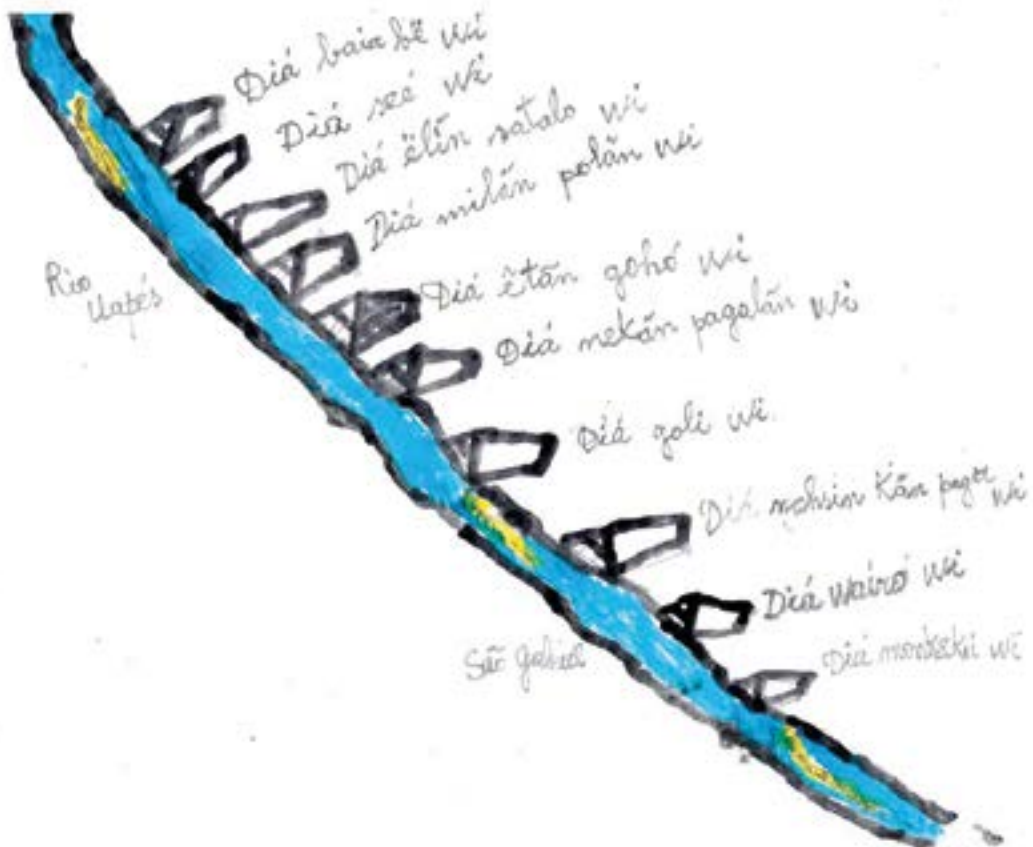
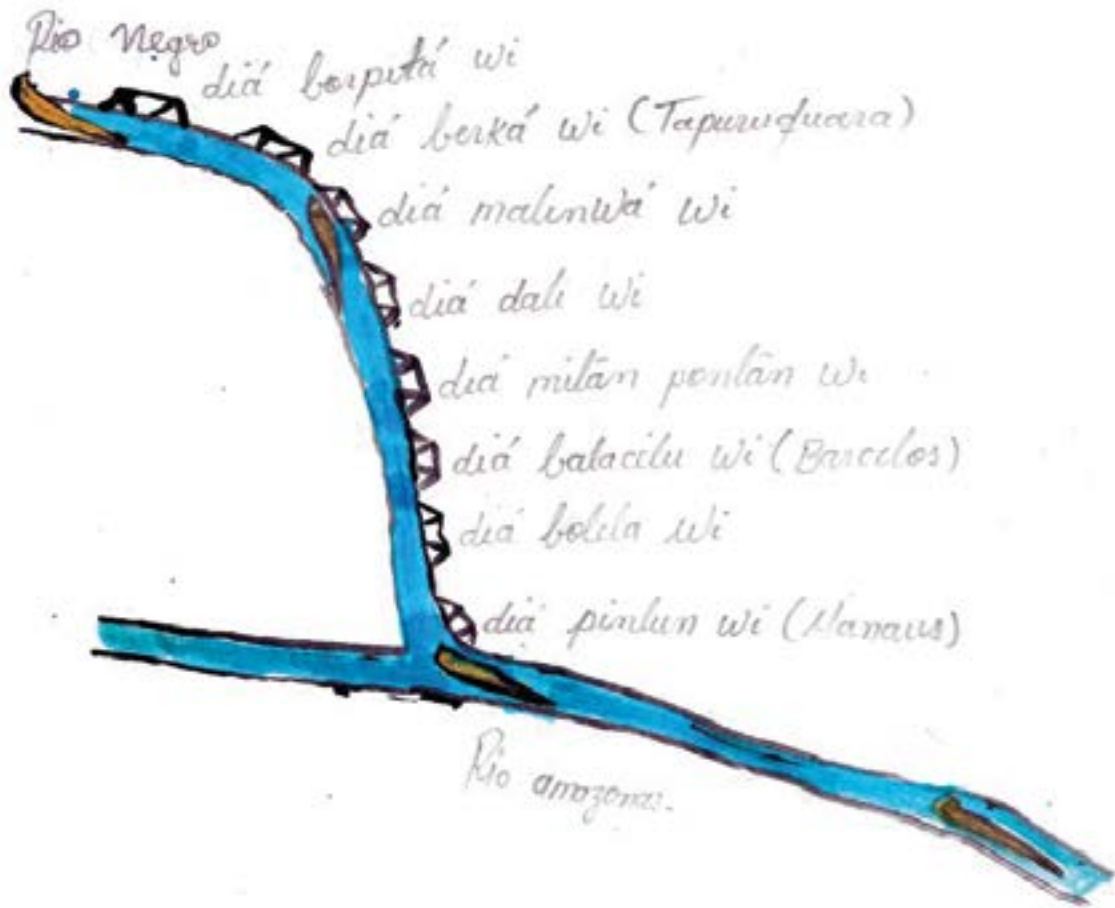
Despite being in a narrative format and in Portuguese, this book is actually a large set of chants that tell the people’s story. We have to imagine this book as several songs or many musics which are actually performed in rituals on the Rio Negro, where these stories are sung. The **Baniwa**, for example, have several songs that tell about **Ñapirikoti**, about Amaro, about the clans, about the transformation of the world, as well as the **Tukano** and other peoples too. They tell the story of how women stole the sacred flutes, or how thunder came to Earth. And they are not texts, they are chants. I think the book is a translation of these chants. I even remembered an opera *Dessana, Dessana*, by the Amazonian writers Márcio Souza and Aldísio Filgueiras. The book, in fact, is as if it were a large opera booklet, with several acts. Of course the Lanás perhaps may

not have thought about this when writing the book, and it's something I'm sharing with you now, so you understand that what is written here is carried out in Rio Negro rituals as songs and dance. It is also a way to pass on the knowledge to younger people.



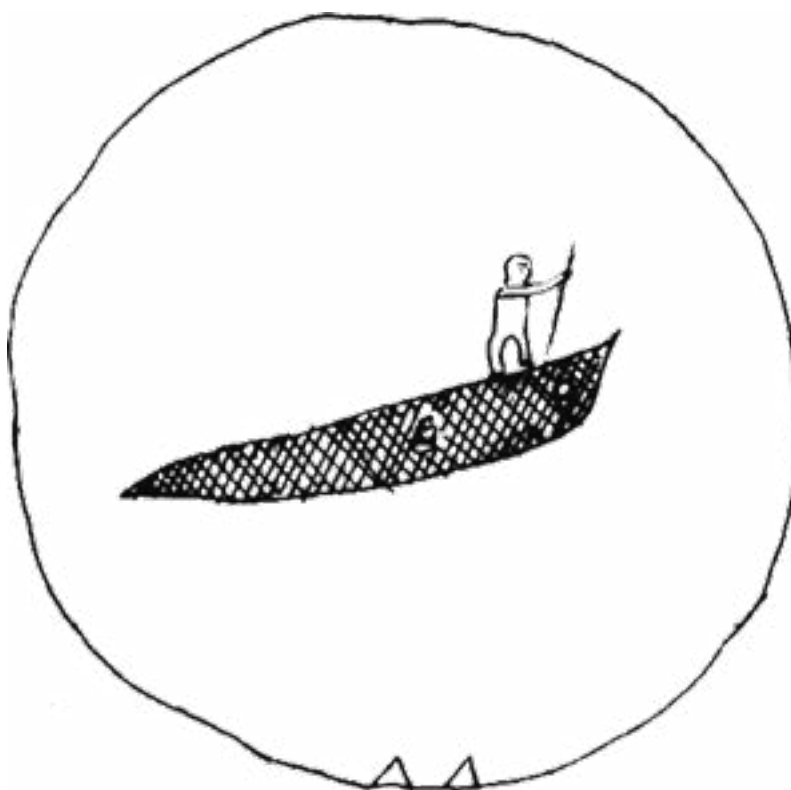
Drawing by Tōrāmũ Kēhíri for the book *Antes o mundo não existia*, page 28

What we are seeing here is a version by Luiz and it didn't exist before. All these stories were told and there was no Snake Canoe format. Even each one counted in their own way. There are some drawings by other *Desana*, *Tukano*, *Tariano*, *Pira-Tapuia* artists too, in which the shapes of this Snake Canoe change. Sometimes people are on top and not inside. Sometimes it's a canoe in the shape of a snake, sometimes it's a submarine, sometimes it's like a shrimp. With this book it was the first time we had more modern visuals in relation to the mythology of a people from Rio Negro. The images we had until then were images of petroglyphs, of stories written on stones. Lana was the one who started painting and publishing more modern drawings showing what these elements of *Desana* mythology are like.

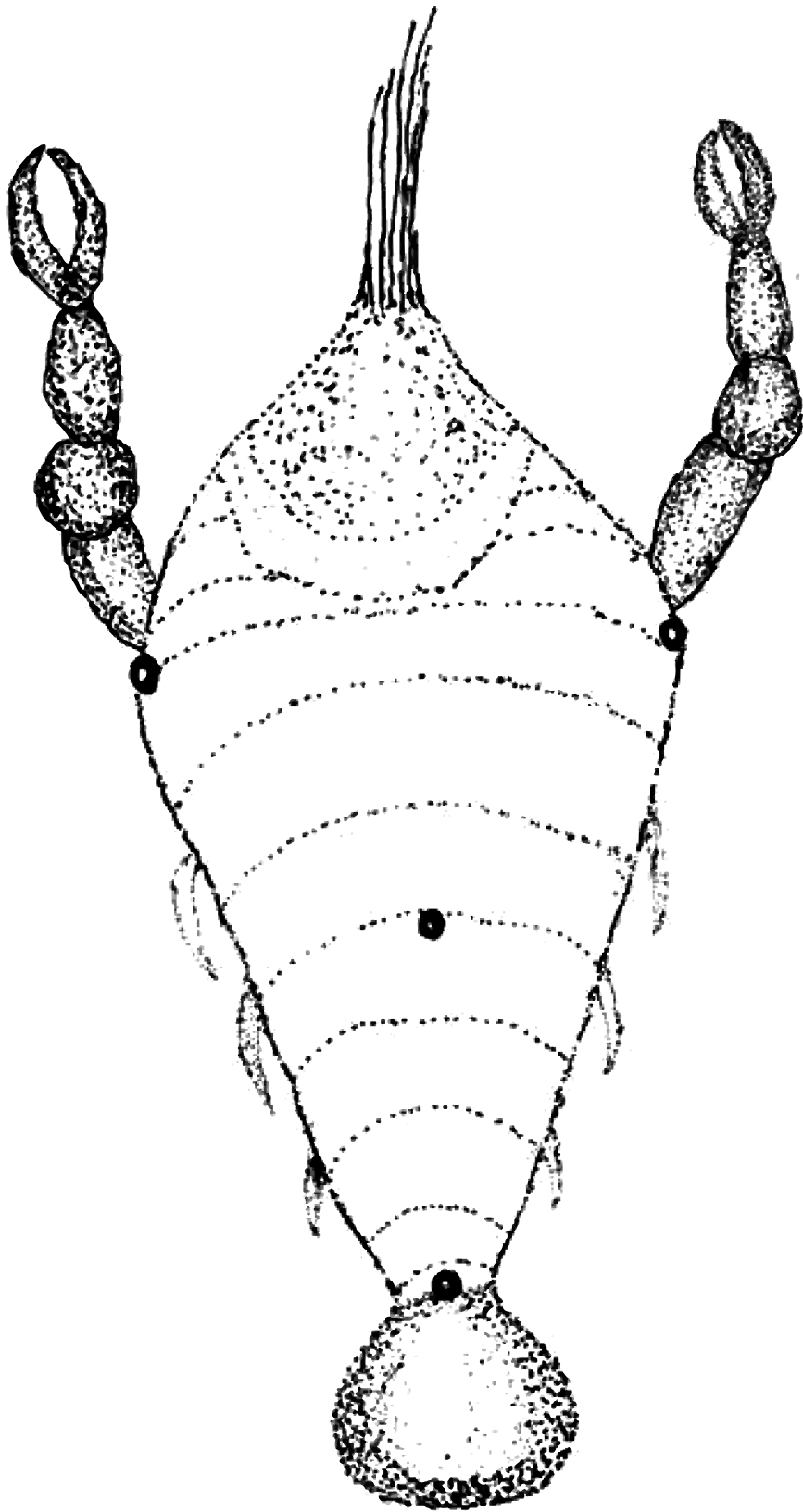


Drawings by Tōrāmū Kēhīri for the book *Antes o mundo não existia*, pages 32 and 33

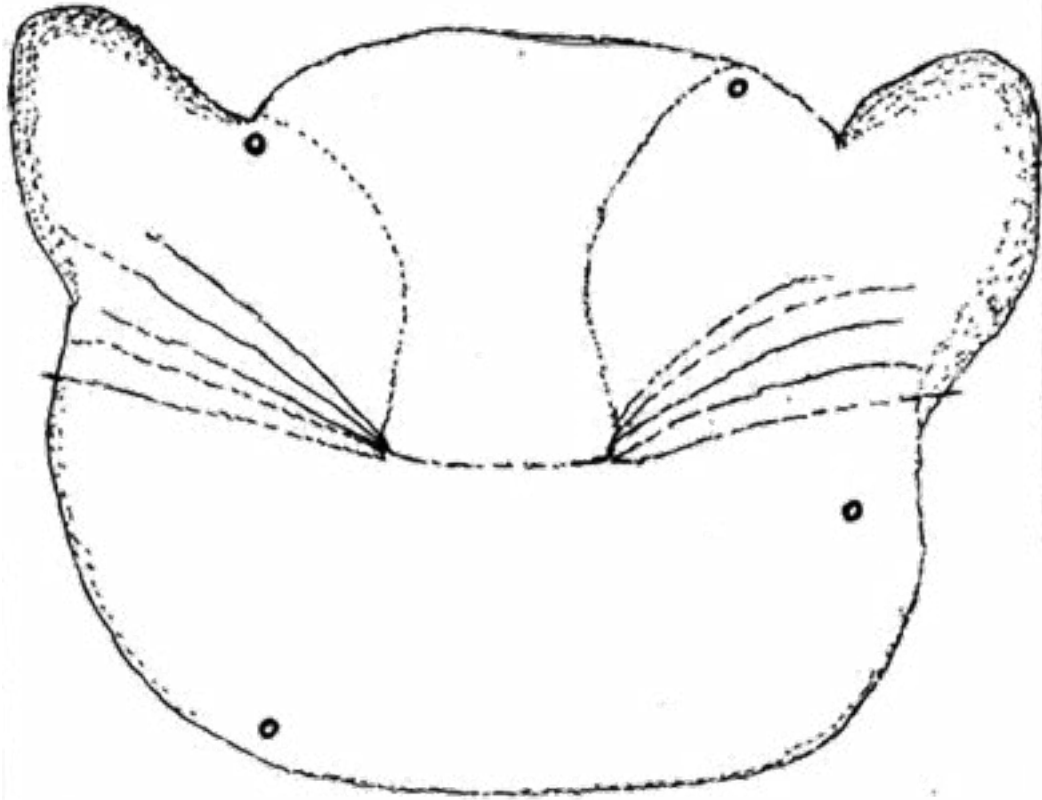
Luiz Lana had lost the whereabouts of these drawings from the first edition. He had said that the drawings from the first edition had been burned. By coincidence, the text reviewer for this book, Cesar Bauman, is Tadeu Bauman's brother, who worked with Berta Ribeiro and had redone these drawings at the Museu Nacional. The drawings of previous editions have the characteristic of having been redone from the originals. On behalf of the *Kadiwéu*, for the book *Biosfera* [Biosphere], I went to Darcy Ribeiro Foundation in Brasília and asked to see Berta Ribeiro's folders related to Luiz Lana. I saw the original drawings redone by Tadeu and found a series of other drawings, including this map and another drawing by Feliciano. This map is a map of where the Lanas live. These clippings may have been from Berta herself. Because they collaborated. There are a series of drawings about the constellations. He shows this rain and planting calendar, all drawn by Luiz Lana. And one more about fishing and one about larvae.



Drawing by Tōrāmū Kēhiri



Nahsīn Kamē (shrimp, constellation)



Yé Disáka Poaló (jaguar, chin, beard)
or Mangá Mẽn puiró (*maniuara* ant, flood)

DENILSON BANIWA

The people of Rio Negro never imagined that this book would be read by people outside of there. And it's incredible that today there are people interested in it and that a publisher republished this book in such an incredible way. So it ends up being, for those who are interested and for those who allow themselves to be touched by the book, a gateway to a gigantic world that is *Desana*, or *Baniwa*, or *Tukano*, ancestral knowledge of the people from Rio Negro. And that can lead to other places. These drawings of the constellation, for example. It's incredible that, after finishing the book, we start trying to find out how *Desana* people look at the sky and understand the sky because the sky is also part of this whole story. Some clans even come from these constellations.

It's amazing that you have found these files. It is part of the history of Rio Negro. It's a shaman's job done by this guy who goes to other worlds and manages to bring all this information to us in a way that is very easy to translate.

I think this drawing of the path is incredible. It reminds me of another scene from Western literature, when Alice meets the Cat for the first time. She asks “Which is the right way?”, and the Cat says “Where do you want to go?”. She replies “I don’t know”, and he adds “For those who don’t know where they want to go, it doesn’t matter which path they take.”



Drawing by Tōrãmũ Kêhíri para o livro *Antes o mundo não existia*, pages 168 e 169

One of the things I discussed with Idjahure was this, this transformation from orality to visuality. And from there we understand the whole context. And I mean we from Rio Negro. Even we, indigenous people, can imagine other possibilities. I even wrote something in that text that may not be right, but it is as if the Lana family, through writing, drawing, and engraving, drew for the first time the face of God and Jesus. There was a person who first drew Jesus with a beard and long hair, and this drawing is reproduced all over the world. And the Lana family did something like this, they transformed something that was very fluid into a drawing that is also very fluid because it changes, it doesn’t have to be just one image, fixed and static. It transforms, and the maps also transform. Because Luiz and Feliciano’s map already has a difference. And then Gabriel Gentil draws a map based on an update made by Feliciano, when he said that Rio de Janeiro is the Mother’s Milk Lake. I think it’s all extraordinary.

I think it's clear that *Natureza Morta 1* [Still Life 1] is a reminder of deforestation, and the advancement of agribusiness, of fires. The destruction of the forest by agribusiness and loggers. In 2016, I saw that there was a form of deforestation that looked a lot like a tortoise or a turtle, and I thought: "Wow, they killed a turtle!" And what I did was think that sometimes these patches of deforestation don't reach some people. They don't understand how much life is lost in that devastated, deforested, destroyed area of the forest. And then I was thinking: "If I put all this together and form an image that makes these people more sensitive, maybe they will understand that it's not just deforestation, it's the entire destruction of an ecosystem." Sometimes even from a biome like Cerrado, which will reach us in the city. And then what I did was take several deforestation spots from these satellite photos and put them together. Then I drew the shape of an animal or a person. Then I take these various stains and put them together until they all form an image. And then there is this double meaning of the name 'still life' being a style of painting and 'still life' also being about destroyed nature, about lives that are lost. It's not just plants that are lost.



Natureza Morta 1 [Still life 1], by Denilson Baniwa

Here's another one, which tells the same story as in the book. That's when *Ñapirikoli* blows the world and things. It's about the creation of things through tobacco smoke, one of the things that is in the book. This moment on this canvas is the moment of the creation of clans, when with the *Ñapirikoli*'s smoke the clans and all life in that universe where we live are created. Then there are the Green Anaconda, Jaguar, Tinamou, Parrot, and Frog clans. These central figures are the World's Navel, which is not a *Tukano* myth, but a *Baniwa* one. And there's a little talk about *adabi*, which is the *kariamã* initiation ceremony. Not that it is directly inspired by the book, consciously, but somehow it is inspired by what I had already seen of Feliciano and Luiz's work.

The name of this work is the translation of *Ñapirikoli*'s name, which is the lord of the cosmos, lord of the universe, owner of the universe. It's a very stately name, and I like it, because it is worthy of a creator.



O Agro não é Pop 1 [Agro is not Pop 1], by Denilson Baniwa

This is an attempt to bring these two worlds together. Of course, the image that catches the most attention is of a girl sitting with a cell phone and headphones, probably listening to [Rádio Yandê](#) [Yandê Internet Radio] which is playing modern indigenous music. And the whole background design is actually what I find most interesting, because that's where I tell these old stories. And I return to what Anna said in the comment that Feliciano and Luiz made about not choosing to illustrate graphics because graphics would only be understood by indigenous people, by those from the indigenous circle. And my work has a lot of that. This image that white people understand, which is a girl sitting listening to music with her smartphone; and there is this other layer that is a layer that the indigenous people understand, from my region, of course. I'm not going to say that the *Kadiwéll* understand the graphics from Rio Negro. The people from Rio Negro understand it. It's this mix of both things.



O Agro não é Pop 2 [Agro is not Pop 2], by Denilson Baniwa

This work at the Museu Afro Brasil was an invitation made to me to be part of an exhibition called *Brasil Profundo* [Deep Brazil] about the indigenous issues. And then they asked me to do a mural right at the entrance to the exhibition. And then I chose the jaguar shaman, who is from this *Baniwa* story of a very powerful shaman who dedicated his life to understanding the world. There was already this series I made about the jaguar shaman, who is sometimes standing up, sometimes he is in the shape of a jaguar, and sometimes he is half jaguar and half human.



Yawareté Payé, by Denilson Baniwa

Sometimes he is, in various ways, completely transformed, or not transformed, or between transformations, anyway. And then I was thinking, considering where I was at the exhibition, about using a resource that was activated by light, so I went looking for paints that have a chemical component that is activated by black light, ultraviolet light. So when the lights are off, not much appears and, when the light is turned on, these ancient beings begin to vibrate, which is, in a way, a metaphor for this indigenous knowledge. They exist, they are available to anyone who wants to get to know them, and only those who want to see them will do so. Or whoever is activated by a book to see this world and, at the same time, we just unlearned how to see these beings that the *Desana* talk about in the book, who are primordial beings and still live among us today. We unlearned how to find them along our path. But if we want to, using the *Desana* or *Baniwa* or *Tukano* means, we can access this world, these other beings that are invisible to those who have been covered by layers and layers of prejudices throughout the world. Prejudices about what is invisible, about what is real and what is not real. And that's the job. There are some *Baniwa* clans, some beings that were in the Milk Lake, in the primordial lake. Because they say that we came from this primordial lake, the first lives, where the Green Anaconda is the owner of the river and the owner of the waters, the mother of all fish. So these primordial beings are activated with this ultraviolet light. And then the Jaguar-Shaman can tell this story, but only when we are activated, so to speak.



Yawareté Payé, by Denilson Baniwa



Petroglifos na Selva de Pedra [Petroglyphs in the Stone Jungle], by Denilson Baniwa

This is a laser projection, which marks the city with lights. This was made for a speech by João Paulo Tukano. While you find the image I will try to answer some questions. I talked to Idjahure about what I aim for when I do some work publicly. My thought is to bring back the memory of these cities. If we look at the history of São Paulo, for example, São Paulo was built from an indigenous village, as the indigenous people are very intelligent and chose the best places to build their villages. São Paulo was born on top of an indigenous village that had rivers as very close connecting roads. During the construction of São Paulo, the entire surrounding area was destroyed and the rivers were silted up. And then there were layers and layers of concrete and iron and garbage until we reached this state where the rivers are dead and silted up and the flow of people becomes very complex, because the area is not made for people transit through. And so, all this indigenous memory of the city, the DNA

of the land, is being erased, covered by these layers of concrete and iron. When I do the murals of the wheatpaste posters on the street and these laser projections, it is to draw attention to the fact that before these cities, this place was an indigenous territory, that there is all this knowledge that is buried there and that needs to come to the surface for us to understand our lives in the modern world. So this is a laser machine; it projects long distances, so I'm very far from that place. These images, it seems that some of them are animated, they fly around. There's a macaw, a snake in the back, and the jaguar shaman's face. But there are several animals and they are animated and keep changing colour. It's a call to urban people, for a story that they may not even know, about the place where they live. It's an attempt to find out about the history of these places, to understand situations that we live in the modern world and that we think have always been like this.

The sky is not the limit of the potential for all this energy of the arts, of all the arts... a lot of people are very interested in visual arts because that is what is emerging a lot now, but I am very interested, for example, in the art of literature, in the art of music, in a whole set of languages. Now, driving the attention to my own land, I say that Rio Negro has an incredible potential, which allows us to understand even very complex situations in the modern world. We were talking about Snake Canoe, and I have a project in which I start to think about this Snake Canoe and these transformations in several other Snake Canoes in the world, until I arrive at this São Paulo subway. Thinking, for example, that Snake Canoe carries all the clans and knowledge of the world in this first moment of creation and that the São Paulo subway carries a huge amount of knowledge and diversity.

Once I was on the subway in São Paulo and there were Chinese, Japanese, Arab, Brazilian, black, and indigenous people inside a modern Snake Canoe. So these are things that allow us to understand the modern world based on all this very ancestral knowledge. Especially because it is knowledge that, in a certain way, travels to the future, past and present, all at the same time. So the potential of all this is impossible to imagine. It ranges from visual art, music, literature, to the construction of very complex thoughts about society.

I want to thank you for the invitation and everyone who attended and say that I am available too. And, to close, I remembered something now about the potential of indigenous arts and indigenous way of thinking: I think about the **Tupinambá** and the French Revolution. There is a story that says that the **Tupinambá** adage 'without king, without god and without boss' influenced the French Revolution. So the potential of indigenous way of thinking is very complex. We learned to put it in a box as something smaller, but it's incredible if we look at it from other perspectives.

DENILSON BANIWA

Jaguar-artist from **Baniwa** indigenous people. Denilson's works express his experience as an indigenous being of present time, mixing traditional and contemporary indigenous references with western icons to communicate native peoples' thinking and struggle in different languages, such as canvas, installations, digital mediums, and performances.

<https://www.behance.net/denilsonbaniwa>

IDJAHURE KADIWEL

Idjahure Kadiwel is a poet and anthropologist, and also works as an editor, translator, interpreter and screenwriter. Born in Rio de Janeiro, he belongs to the **Terena** and **Kadiwel** peoples, from the Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul. He has a degree in Social Sciences from PUC-Rio (2017), a master's degree in Social Anthropology from the Museu Nacional / UFRJ (2020), and is doing his PhD in Social Anthropology at USP. Since 2016, he has been a correspondent for Rádio Yandê. His works and research focus on ethnomedia and indigenous arts.

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial coordination is by Alice Faria and the design by Tania Grillo and Érico Peretta. The editorial coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus. This notebook is a co-edition with Idjahure Kadiwel who guided the *Reading Cycle Antes o mundo não existia*. We counted on the special collaboration of Larissa Vaz who transcribed Denilson Baniwa's speech.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

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TRANSLATION REVISION
CARLOS RANGEL

I'm a translator living in São Paulo, proud to help Selvagem spread the culture and the ancient wisdom of Brazil's traditional communities.

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