



Antonio Pichillá in the studio. Courtesy of the artist.

**Elizabeth Xi Bauer Gallery presents:
Antonio Pichillá
29th September – 11th November 2023
Private View: Thursday, 28th September, 2023**

Elizabeth Xi Bauer Gallery, London, is pleased to announce **Antonio Pichillá's** first solo exhibition in Europe. This exhibition closely follows *Inherited Threads*, at Tate Modern, a new collection display of works by North and Latin American artists that were recently acquired by the institution, as well as *Antonio Pichillá Quiacain: Tejiendo El Paisaje*, a video installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara.

For the exhibition opening this September at Elizabeth Xi Bauer, Pichillá will experiment with ways of hanging and displaying his works, including: hanging them from the ceiling; video installation; as well as utilising found objects from nature and alongside those that are man-made.

Antonio Pichillá focuses on the ever-developing connections between western contemporary art and the vernacular tradition of craft. Using natural materials Pichillá draws from Mayan epistemology to: *"Restlessly look for a bond that integrate(s) with the environment as something inexact, uncoded. I struggle to give form to transitory states"*.

Examining the ancient culture of his native Tz'utujil heritage and the postcolonial notion of a homogenous national identity, Pichillá's works are an act of resistance to otherness and binary constructions of identity. Instead, his work celebrates the heterogeneity of everyday contemporary Tz'utujil life. From his studio at Lake Atitlán the artist's practice is driven by anthropological research into Guatemala's urban and rural regions. Pichillá is interested in the relationship between found natural objects, such as rocks and branches and his textile works, as well as man-made objects.

Two works which celebrate contemporary life juxtaposed with traditions of the Tz'utujil, are *La Piedra De Sol (The Sun Stone)* and *Espantapajaro (Scarecrow)*. *La Piedra De Sol (The Sun Stone)* is inspired by a day in the Mayan calendar, B'atz (Knot) day, which celebrates beginning and ending, tying and untying, winding and unwinding, much like existence itself. It is also a healing mechanism too, like a necklace used by spirit guides today. *Espantapajaro (Scarecrow)* is inspired by scarecrows that the artist has seen, the handmade form that helps protect growing plants from birds. For the artist, it is an important part within the agricultural life cycle, especially early on when the crop is vulnerable at the beginning of February

when the first rains fall. The work is made from found threads, textiles and pieces of wood creating a protective yet strange, menacing shape. The artist is interested in the relationship between bodies, memory, fabric, and identity.

In Pichillá's *Grandfather series* (2014 – 2020) he reclaims textile art and examines his relationship with his mother, a weaver.

The artist explains, *"In San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá, a Maya Tz'utujil town, men's trousers are made from white fabric with a pattern consisting of black vertical marks. Inspired by this pattern design, in these works I have incorporated fabrics dyed in red, black and yellow. Such colorful designs are uncommon, for those both those wearing and weaving them alike. My inclusion of these colours is a gesture to the four colours of corn. I start with the main pattern and then alter it and assemble it over the stretched canvas. From the perspective of western aesthetics, this technique might be perceived as resembling minimalist painting from the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, these pieces could be interpreted as a type of "intercultural abstraction" employing codes that arise from within their context of production."*

Pichillá's *Grandmother series* (2016 – 2020) connects him with generations of Guatemala's Maya female weavers.

"Guatemala has an enormous cultural richness when it comes to textiles, and it is usually women who design and weave them. Their skills are transferred from generation to generation. The materials and tools used in the art of weaving fulfill fundamental functions. For example, the warping frame is essential for designing textiles. It consists of a flat wooden surface fitted with pegs. In the case of a backstrap loom, counting the threads, tying, and measuring them, is achieved by using one's fingers, thus conjoining the tool with the body," Pichillá explains.

"Through these actions, I create works related to the warping frame. Over the surface of a canvas, I placed threads reaching different directions, joining various strands and fibres of maguey, and then wrapped them over a stretcher. For the textile pieces, I made braids using thread fringes, resembling a grandmother's hairdo."

These works act as Pichillá's tribute to Maya women as he explains, *"Currently, it is indigenous women who are resisting, protecting and embracing the use of traditional clothing in Guatemala's Maya communities."*

Later this year, Pichillá will launch a publication which explores his artistic practice to date as well as seminal works from his career. The publication includes an introduction by curator Alexia Tala; writings from curator Cecilia Fajardo Hill; anthropologist Maria Jacinta Xon; as well as an interview with the artist conducted by Pablo José Ramírez, a Curator at the Hammer Museum Curator and former Adjunct Curator of First Nations and Indigenous Art at Tate Modern.

Occurring in 2023 is the 22nd Biennial of Sesc_Videobrasil – *Memory is an Editing Station*. The 40-Year Special will feature works by Antonio Pichillá. Taking place at Sesc 24 de Maio, São Paulo, Brazil, from 18th October 2023 – 25th February 2024, the biennial is curated by Raphael Fonseca, from Brazil, and Renée Akitelek Mboya, from Kenya. As well as exhibiting artworks at Sesc_Videobrasil, Antonio Pichillá will participate in a biennial talk on 21st October, entitled *Land, Rights and Indigenous Technologies*. The talk is moderated by Amanda Carneiro and participating speakers include Pamela Cevallos, Brook Andrew, and Amanda Carneiro.

Antonio Pichillá's work is also currently on display at Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. *Communicating Vessels*, which runs until the end of 2023, is an exhibition of the museum's permanent collection which has been organised into episodes of varying interdisciplinary approaches and narratives, with artworks featured spanning from 1881 to the present day.

Notes to Editors

Antonio Pichillá (born 1982 in San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala) lives and works in San Pedro La Laguna. Pichillá earned his BFA from the Rafael Rodríguez Padilla Art School in Guatemala City. In 2017 Pichillá

received the Juannio Award an important recognition for Guatemalan artists. The artist participated in the 2002, 2010 and 2014 editions Bienal de Arte Paiz, Guatemala. In 2020 Pichillá work was exhibited in the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. In summer 2022, Tate Modern, London, UK, opened *Inherited Threads*, a new collection display of works by North and Latin American artists that were recently acquired by the institution. In 2023, *Antonio Pichillá Quiacaín: Tejiendo El Paisaje*, a video installation by the artist was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, USA.

Pichillá's work has also been exhibited at Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany; the Museo de arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico; Museo de arte popular, Mexico City; Para Site, Hong Kong; Galeria Leme, São Paulo, Brazil; Denver Art Museum, Denver, USA; as well as a solo exhibition at Hessel Museum of Art, New York, USA.

Pichillá's work is in permanent collections including: Tate Modern, London; Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; Banco de España, Spain; Colección Quinto Lojo, Guatemala; Lars Romer Copenhagen, Denmark; Dexter Lelain San Francisco, USA; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco; Denver Art Museum, Denver; Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, Washington, USA; Space Collection, Los Angeles, USA; Colección Luiz Chrysóstomo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Il Posto, Vitacura, Chile.

Elizabeth Xi Bauer presents an exhibition of works by Antonio Pichillá which will run from 29th September – 11th November 2023, open Wednesday through to Saturday, 12 – 6 pm or by appointment. A Private View will be held on 28th September 2023, 6 – 8 pm in the presence of the artist. The artist will be available for interviews.

A Dropbox with additional press material can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hdjihvxt62qgh22zhwz8b/h?dl=0&rlkey=gvc0t0rgry907jzni0f933hr1>

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Image credit: Antonio Pichillá in the studio. Courtesy of the artist.

Additional Quotes from the Artist

Further exploring Maya civilisations, the piece *Glyphs (Contemporary Archeology)* (2010-2019), which consists of several artworks installed together, navigates a contemporary world in which sacred stones have been displaced.

"Stone is considered sacred by Maya civilisation and is used to register historical events and deeds. As well as this, stone is also used by Maya civilisation in mathematics and astronomy, amongst other applied sciences," Pichillá explains.

"Many sacred stones are currently located in museums and private spaces; they are locked away in display cases. In contrast to this, Maya communities continue to use stones for ceremonial purposes, as a way of giving thanks and to connect with the energy of mother nature and the ancestors."

"For these works I have carved stones in the shape of a ream of letter-sized paper (21.5 x 28.5 x 5 cm) and also collected stones, extracted from Lake Atitlán. I then took this collection of stones to a ceremonial location."

"I adorned these stones with threads and textiles as an allusion to the sacred abuelos (grandfathers) and abuelas (grandmothers). These works give thanks for their wisdom, and reaffirms the authenticity of the ancestors by moving the stones from a private space to a public one. In these works I play with what is seen and what is hidden."

Kukulkán is a pre-Hispanic deity, also known as Q'uuq' Kumatz in the Popol Wuuj. Kan is a day in the Maya calendar that represents balance and justice. Shaped in the form of a plumed serpent, it refers to the divinity of the bird in the sky, and of the serpent on earth.

"In the Kukulkán series (2010-2021) I have developed installations where knotted textiles are hung onto walls, zigzagging up and down, thus resembling the plumed serpent. In other instances, I suspended textiles and threads from a height, while fastening them to grinding stones in order to project the idea and shape of a serpent," Pichillá explains.

"In my most recent work in this series, executed in 2021, I extracted an image of the deity as it appears in a codex that is presently located in Madrid."

"This codex has a prophetic character, and during its time, it was analysed by pre-Hispanic spiritual guides. Therein, we can interpret the image of a serpent (page 30 of the Kumatzin wuj ka'l book, "Madrid Codex"). I represented the deity in a sculptural manner, giving it a physical and energetic presence through the warping frame (a weaving tool), where the threads that appear in the image of Q'uq'umatz are superimposed and interconnected."