

FIBRA

Post Institute Von Goetz

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Curated by: Mia Pfeifer

In February 2018 FiBRA residency invited eight London-based multidisciplinary artists to observe and participate in the textile-centred practices of the Kogi and Wayuu indigenous communities in Colombia, for whom the preservation of ancient skills in the working of natural fibres is considered to be a fundamental and indispensable element of their social structure.

For both the Kogi and the Wayuu, the geographical location of their revered land offered for centuries a niche for their traditions to prevail, but these sacred territories are no longer exempt from the realities of globalisation and complexity of today's interrelated world.

During the FiBRA residency, we were witness to the impact on the ecosystem and society due to the increase of new visitors and tourists to La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta y La Guajira, inadequate management of natural resources and environmental pollution, introduction to new materials, dietary changes and forced displacement which irrevocably impacts directly the sustainable practice of the Wayuu and Kogi daily traditions and challenges the preservation of their core values.

"This experience was a deep reminder of our existential relationship to the land and to matter. In our western lives, in cities, surrounded by man-made structures, belief systems and our own reality – the news, social media, clocks, buildings, tarmac – we are somehow allowed to forget that everything, absolutely everything that surrounds us, comes from this planet we live on. The food we eat, the water we drink, the copper in our phones, our drugs, our cars, our machines, our feelings, our children, our mucous, our hair, our hair removal products... We know it, obviously, as something we are taught in books, at school. But we forget it. We brush it aside and stick to our human bubble of time and rituals and symbols. We talk about conservation, preservation, climate change, ecology, as things that are academic and scientific rather than existential.

Being in a context where the chains of production and consumption are all localised brought that reality home: you cut the leaf that you weave your clothes with; if you want to eat chicken you kill it yourself - it's not abstracted into a chicken nugget; when you wash yourself, you see the impact of your soap in the water... Your footprint is visible, and you remember that everything could have been otherwise. That what we live in is not some transcendental reality but a set of beliefs that we decide to adhere to and are taught to ascribe to, hand over power to, play the rules to.

*There is something awe-inspiring about the sheer scale and ambition of human culture. We depend on millions of people every day simply to feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, house ourselves. We are surrounded by man-made things, mirrors of ourselves, and I sometimes wonder if we aren't drowning in our own narcissism."**