

Louidgi Beltrame

La huaca llora

25.04-07.07.24

EN

La Loge

Kluisstraat 86 - rue de l'Ermitage
B-1050 Brussels

At the start of his artistic career, Louidgi Beltrame focused on the ghosts and failings of modernism from a non-Western perspective, specifically in the fields of architecture and cinema. Following on from this work, and with a focus on the decolonisation of thought, over the last ten years the artist has taken a particular interest in different ontologies, cosmologies, and epistemologies.

Since 2012, Louidgi Beltrame has been carrying out research in Peru, which has led him to the Nazca geoglyphs and to film the practice of the *curandero* José Levis Picón Saguma, a traditional healer or shaman. It was while exploring the different aspects of the Peruvian coastal desert, dotted with pyramids and pre-Columbian necropolises known as *huacas*, that he became interested in the elusive figure of the *huaquero* (clandestine grave digger).

Huaqueros exist between several worlds: they are connected to the Andean vernacular and a pre-colonial past based on community relations characterised by the notion of redistribution; they uphold a relationship of mutual respect with the 'other-than-human beings' whose land they share, and finally, the *huaqueros* operate at the threshold of the archaeo-trafficking world. While the aim of the *huaqueros* is to sell a proportion of the objects they find, they operate within a

complex network of intermediaries that includes forgers, collectors, museums, healers, shamans, and rural communities. And despite the fact that, from a legal point of view, their activity is illegal, *huaqueros* are regarded as specialists or empirical archaeologists within Andean communities. In the 19th and 20th centuries, driven by necessity and post-colonial control, they worked for Western archaeologists on exploratory missions in search of the precious pre-Columbian artefacts hidden in the *huacas*. After their excavations, the *huaqueros* would visit a *curandero* to be 'cleansed'. Occasionally, in exchange for the treatment, they would offer the healer an object from the *huaca*. These transactions go beyond the purely speculative and financial, since during these collective healing ceremonies (*mesas curanderas*), the artefacts exchanged are reintegrated into the ritual and sacred circuit, and once again become vehicles for the transmission of pre-Columbian knowledge. This clandestine excavation, *la huaquería*, could, therefore, be seen as a form of resistance to colonialism, maintaining pre-colonial practices and knowledge.

The *huaca* is said to weep (*la huaca llora*) when streams of sand begin to run down the sides of the exhumed tomb, threatening to collapse and swallow the clandestine diggers. In Andean cosmology, the *huaca* is seen as a person with whom the *huaqueros* enter into a two-way relationship. During the excavations, the *huaqueros* practise a ritual that involves the offering and consumption of coca leaves and tobacco. After questioning the *huaca*, they use a *baqueta* to examine the ground, locating the burial site and the objects concealed within. These might be *huacos* (ritual ceramics), textiles, or precious metal artefacts.

Louidgi Beltrame's *La huaca llora (the huaca weeps)* at La Loge brings together films, photos, ink works on cotton canvas, and a sculpture, all based on the *huaqueros'* practice.

In the entrance, a video shows *huacos* (pre-Columbian ritual ceramics) in rotation. These ceramics come from the Pacasmayo region and belong to a local, private, semi-clandestine collection of pieces purchased over the years from *huaqueros* by the current owner's father.

In the temple, the aluminium sculpture presented here is based on a 3D scan of the hole created by the opening of a tomb on Cerro La Mina in the Jequetepeque Valley, where *huaqueros* discovered an opulent Mochica burial site. Rendered tangible, the cavity in the tomb is transformed into a centrifugal force, a vortex, a reminder of the extent to which these spaces are a gateway to other worlds, where humans and non-humans establish relationships and engage in transactions.

The vortexes are inks on cotton cloth mounted on stretchers. These works, which can be seen throughout La Loge, were created by Louidgi Beltrame in a state of concentration. The artist makes wide gestures in a single, direct, rapid movement around a circular space left untouched. Progressively shorter and finer strokes, often in a second colour, are applied with a brush until the entire surface is covered. Once stretched, the delicate material emphasises the optical and vibratory aspects of these interventions, allowing an energy to emerge that pulls the viewer's eye and body towards its centre.

Two videos show the various stages of the *huaquería*, or clandestine excavations, that Luidgi Beltrame attended at the Pakatnamu site in the coastal desert of northern Peru. Each screen shows a team of two *huaqueros*, Marlon and his friend José Luis, followed by Terreco and his son, Oscar.

A third video presented on a flat screen documents a *mesa* (table in Spanish) at Terreco's house, in the rural community of Jequetepeque. This *mesa*, tantamount to a syncretic altar, is set up on a sofa in his bedroom and comprises various objects collected during the *huaquero's* excavations. In particular, it features a set of human skulls that he uses in healing rituals.

In the triangular space and on the first floor, a series of thirty-one analogue photographs, entitled *Huancor, 17h, apparition des images (2024)*, follows the artist's journey through the rocky landscape of the Huancor archaeological site in the south of the Peruvian Andes. These images, taken at dusk, capture on a single roll of film the precise moment when the light falls upon the rocks, revealing the ancient petroglyphs engraved like palimpsests on the surface of the stones over several millennia. Birds, mammals, reptiles, humans, and other more indeterminate creatures inhabit this rocky landscape in the middle of the desert.

A colour silver photograph, *Après la Mesa*, bears witness to the end of a *mesa curandera* session in the town of Chincha, a night of healing led by José Levis Picón Saguma, a *curandero* with whom Luidgi Beltrame has been interacting since 2015. Amongst a few vernacular architectural elements, we can see the back of an old Ford Mustang, belonging to one of the healer's assistants, who, lacking sufficient income, does not actually use it, but rather looks after it, making it a "cult object" that focuses his attention.

On the second floor, *La huaca pleure, avec les voix*, is a video in four chapters featuring the stories told by *huaqueros* Marlon and Terreco, archaeologist Juan Pablo, and the Maqueras couple, each of whom has a specific relationship with the Pakatnamu site. Stories of everyday life and magical, ghostly encounters are combined with images of the archaeological site and the narrators' homes. These micro-stories add up to a portrait of a community where the living and the dead intermingle and interact.

Louidgi Beltrame was born in Marseille and lives and works in Paris. He has had solo exhibitions at the Crédac Contemporary Art Centre in Ivry sur Seine (2024), the MAC Lima in Peru (2021), the Centre d'Art Contemporain Circuit in Lausanne (2019), the Centre d'Art Contemporain Passerelle in Brest (2019), the Palais de Tokyo (2016), the FRAC Basse-Normandie (2015), the Kunstverein in Langenhagen (2015), and Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris (2014, 2019).

He participated in the 12th Gwangju Biennale in 2018 and took part in the programme developed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul as part of the 11th Sharjah Biennale in 2013. He has taken part in numerous festivals including FID Marseille, Doclisboa and International Film Festival Rotterdam, as well as group exhibitions including *Meia Noite*, Coimbra Biennial of Contemporary Art (2022), *Les Envoûtés*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2021) *A Natural History of Ruins*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Pivô, Sao-Paulo, Brazil (2021), *Stadtansichten*, Kunstverein Heidelberg (2018), *Y he aquí la luz*, Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia de Bogota (2017), *What is not visible is not invisible*, National Museum of Singapore (2016), *Flatland*, Musée d'art contemporain de Sérignan (2016), *Plagiar of Futuro*, Hangar, Lisbon (2015), *Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cinémathèque Française, Paris (2015), *Double Jeu*, FRAC Centre, Orléans, 2014.

Non-alphabetic and subjective glossary for the exhibition La huaca llora

Huaca is a term derived from the Quechua and Aymara word *wak'a*, which, in modern Peruvian usage, refers to Pre-Columbian ruins, temples, pyramids and necropolises. Before the Spanish conquest, the word designated any sacred space or object, whether a temple, mountain, lake or boulder, but could also denote certain categories of objects, such as *huacos* (ceramic pieces used for rituals) and ancestral or other mummies. *Huacas* are considered people, 'beings other than humans', with which Andean peoples maintain a reciprocal relationship, thus expanding the Western ontology of the sacred and undermining the modernist separation between nature and culture, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, etc.

The term **huaqueros**, derived from the word *huaca*, can be translated as grave robbers. Traditional *huaqueros*, as opposed to pillagers from big cities, are usually members of a rural community with direct access to pre-Columbian ruins. Their practice is inscribed in a web of relationships such that they are considered special intermediaries between the community and its ancestors, the living and the dead. They are considered 'local experts about the past' who possess an alternative knowledge about archaeological sites and the artifacts they seek, as well as ritual practices mean to obtain the favour of a *huaca*, which is considered a living being itself, one that can be generous but also potentially dangerous. Most *huaqueros* have other, often temporary, day jobs, as field hands, construction workers or fishermen. *Huaqueo* is not their sole

means of subsistence. Sometimes they sell the artefacts they dig up to dealers who resell them to big city collectors. After their illicit excavations, often *huaqueros* seek to have themselves 'cleansed' by a local *curandero* (shaman). In exchange for his or her services, they give the *curandero* one or two *huacos* to use as part of their practice as healers. The excavated and exchanged object thus recovers its agency¹ in the circuit of rituals that arose in the centuries after it was buried, an alternative to the circuits of anthropology museums and illegal trafficking. Furthermore, it's not unusual for *huaqueros* to accumulate small-scale collections, called *huacotecas*, whether personal or belonging to the community.

The term **huacos** refers to pre-Columbian ritual ceramics that anthropologists have extensively studied and historically sequenced. Pre-Columbian Peru had a rich tradition of making fabrics and ceramics now found in museum anthropological collections and private holdings. Along with other precious artifacts (like metal pieces and fabrics), they are the contents of pre-Columbian tombs that attract *huaqueros* and archaeologists alike. They are also coveted by dealers and pre-Columbian art collectors. As a result of their complex 'social life', they are sometimes included in *mesas curanderas* (group healing ceremonies) held by *curanderos* (shamans) where they are prized for the agency arising from the 'cumulative charge' acquired in the *huacas* and their connectivity with the pre-Hispanic past.

A **baqueta** is a tool wielded by *huaqueros* to probe the ground in a search for pre-Columbian graves and the artifacts buried in them. It is a long, tapered steel rod with a t-shaped handle, made by local metalworkers from repurposed construction materials.

A **bolo de coca** is a cud of coca leaves chewed by *huaqueros* as an energizer as well as to reduce hunger and thirst while doing difficult labour in a desert climate. The leaves are chewed for a long time until they form a kind of ball. The *huaqueros* also use coca leaves for divination, to find the graves in the *huacas*. The leaves are consumed along with tabaco, another plant considered sacred in the Andean tradition. People have also utilized coca for medical purposes since pre-Columbian times.

In Andean societies a **curandero** (or, if a woman, *curandera*) is a traditional healer or shaman. Their therapeutic practice takes into account the patient's place in the community. This approach is deeply rooted in pre-Columbian traditions involving the worship of *huacas* and the use of 'master' or sacred (psychotropic) and medicinal plants. The Catholic Inquisition repressed the *curanderos* in the name of 'eradicating idolatry' among the Andean peoples, and this practice is still somewhat clandestine in Peru, relegated to isolated rural communities and urban shantytowns. Contemporary *curandero* practice has absorbed Catholic culture and continually recasts it. This makes it an example of the syncretic forms produced by Andean peoples resisting colonial repression, an anthropophagy² (or cultural cannibalism) in which colonized peoples absorb the culture of the colonizers in order to keep their

own culture alive, giving birth to a syncretic culture.

A **mesa curandera** is a secretly-held group healing session. It is an all-night affair led by a *curandero* (healer) who practices a vernacular variety of medicine rooted in pre-Columbian knowledge and based principally on the use of psychotropic plants (San Pedro cactuses, coca leaves), tabaco, fragrances and objects endowed with magic powers, whether *huacos*, stones taken from certain huacas, or images of particular Catholic saints such as Saint Cyprian and Saint Anthony. The term *mesa* (table, in Spanish) also designates the ensemble of objects activated by a San Pedro cactus during the ceremony. Archeological excavations have revealed that in Andean cosmology this interspecies relationship between the San Pedro cactus (*huachuma* in Quechua) and human beings extends back more than 3,000 years.

1. The term 'agency' is here used in reference to Alfred Gell's posthumous work *Art and Agency* (ed. Oxford University Press, 1998). The publication was translated into French as *L'art et ses agents, une théorie anthropologique*, ed. Alexandre Laumonier and Stéphanie Dubois, 2009.

2. See Oswaldo de Andrade, "Manifesto Antropófago", in *Revista de Antropofagia*, volume 1, 1929.

WORKS

Entrance

La huaca pleure, avec les huacos, 2024
Video 4K HD transfer, 10 min 19 s

From left to right
Vortex 5, 2024
Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Vortex 7, 2024
Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Temple

La Mina, 2024
Cast aluminium

Vortex 2, 2024
Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Vortex 4, 2024
Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

La huaca pleure, avec Marlon et José Luis, 2024
4K Video HD transfer, 11 min 34 s

La huaca pleure, avec Terreco et Oscar, 2024
4K Video HD transfer, 13 min 39 s

La huaca pleure, avec Terreco et la Mesa, 2024
4K Video HD transfer, 6 min 34 s

Triangle & First floor

Huancor, 17h, apparition des images, 2024
31 black and white silver prints on Ilford Multigrade FB Warmtone baryta paper
Approx. 39 x 25,5 cm

Après la Mesa
Colour silver print on Fujifilm crystal archive DP-II matte paper
92 x 62 cm

Second floor

Vortex 1, 2024

Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Vortex 8, 2024

Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Vortex 6, 2024

Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

Vortex 3, 2024

Inks on cotton voile
81 x 62,5 cm

La huaca pleure, avec les voix, 2024

4K Video HD transfer, 53 min 2 s

All works are presented with the kind permission of the artist and Galerie Jousse
Entreprise.

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Through the eyes of Anaïs Chabeur

30.05.24, 18:30

A subjective guided tour of the exhibition.

Biography

Anaïs Chabeur (1992) is an artist based in Brussels. Through films, installations, and participative offerings she crafts poetic and sensorial atmospheres and invitations to inhabit time consciously. The intimacies of dying are an underlying topic in her work and life. Since 2022 Anaïs has been active as a palliative care volunteer, offering presence and massages to terminally ill patients. Her work has been shown in collective exhibitions in institutions such as SMAK (Ghent), De Singel (Antwerp), Wiels (Brussels), and CIAP (Hasselt). She has had solo shows at Botanique, V2Vingt, and Atelier Arthur Rogiers (Brussels). For the period of 2024–2026, Anaïs will be a researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp with her project “Visions for Crossing”.

Practical information

Language: English

Duration: ca. 45mn

Free access upon reservation

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Acknowledgements

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La huaca llora would not have been possible without the artist Louidgi Beltrame's engaged collaboration.

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The team of La Loge

Director and curator: Wim Waelput

Communication and curator of public programmes: Antoinette Jattiot

Intern: Martina Lattuca

Visual identity: Antoine Begon, Boy Vereecken

Production: Léonor Gomez, Arthur Jules

Audio & vidéo: Ludo Engels

Photography: Lola Pertsowsky

Exhibition video: Anais Chabeur

Translations and proofreadings: BLURBS, Entre les lignes

First Sight ambassador: Johan Larsen

Volunteers: Alice Beiglig, Ina Ciumakova, Inès Guffroy, Mia Brena Minetti, Sepehr Sharifzadeh, Thibaud Leplat.

Opening hours

From Thursday to Sunday

13:00 - 18:00

Free entrance.

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La Loge is a non-profit association. La Loge is supported by the Flemish Government, the French Community (FWB), the Flemish Community Commission (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie - VGC) and First Sight, La Loge's community of engaged individuals and organizations. La Loge receives additional support from the Municipality of Ixelles, French Community Commission (COCOF) and National Lottery of Belgium. La Loge is a member of 50° NORD-3° EST and Brussels Museums.

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