

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Santiago Yahuarcani
Flight of the White Heron
Clan

54 Franklin St
New York
10013

14 November – 17 January 2025

Opening: Friday 14 November,
6–8 pm

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday 10am–6pm
Saturday 12–6pm



El vuelo del bamco, 2023

Stephen Friedman Gallery, in collaboration with CRISIS Gallery (Lima), is pleased to co-present *Flight of the White Heron Clan*, the first New York solo exhibition of **Santiago Yahuarcani**. An advocate for the rights of his clan—the Áimeni of the Uitoto Nation—and a leading figure in contemporary Indigenous art, Yahuarcani paints on *llanchama*, a bark cloth that he harvests and prepares by hand. Opening in the wake of his highly acclaimed participation in the 2024 Venice Biennale, and as his work receives timely monographic surveys across Europe and Latin America, this exhibition brings New York audiences outstanding compositions that carry his clan's history and worldviews.

Born in 1960 into a lineage of artists and healers, Yahuarcani inherits stories transmitted by his mother and grandfather, Martha and Gregorio López. These include the enslavement and genocide inflicted by rubber barons on the Uitoto and other nations in the Colombian Amazon (1879–1914), and his family's subsequent migrations, amid regional wars, before resettling in Peru in the 1940s. Since the 1980s, he has painted on *llanchama*, turning the bark cloth into a counter-archive for memory and repair.

In this exhibition, new and recent works distil clan stories and figure the Amazon as a site of both violence and resistance. In *La savia que se transformó en llanto de sangre* (*The Sap that Became a Weeping of Blood*, 2025), he evokes historical violence without centring its perpetrators: a forest spirit (crowned by a creation scene) bleeds and weeps, registering loss while affirming an enduring spirituality. In *La selva está moribunda* (*The Amazon Is Dying*, 2019), a machete, oil spill, and flag-bearing tower signal extraction and its impacts, while Uitoto men and women prepare plants to summon protective beings. Through works like these, Yahuarcani confronts violent histories while keeping Indigenous agency and voice at the centre.

Other works on view exemplify how Yahuarcani's work is inseparable from his clan's cultural practices and land. In *El vuelo del bamco* (*Flight of the Shaman*, 2023), a shaman becomes an eagle in a swift metamorphosis, mirroring accounts from his mother, a healer, who taught him that visions accessed during *ampiri* (a tobacco-based paste) and coca sessions function as spiritual "flights". Among the Áimeni, *ampiri* also structures storytelling in the *maloca* (communal longhouse), where origin histories are recounted. Yahuarcani, in fact, often turns to the substance for guidance when choosing subjects. Local plants and materials also underwrite the techniques that inform Yahuarcani's work.

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For *El vuelo del bamco* he applies paint in swift, repeated dabs with hand-carved branches he has fashioned since the start of his career, rather than brushes. Colour is likewise rooted in place—orange tones from the rhizome of *guisador* (*Curcuma longa*) model skin, while deep reds from *achiote* (*Bixa orellana*) build layered feathers that sharpen into talons and beak. Here, technique and material are never merely formal; they sustain a living dialogue with nature and with the cultural practices that emerge from it.

Central in Yahuarcani's work is the surface that grounds it: *llanchama*. In *Santo remedio de Shanti* (*Shanti's Magic Remedy*, 2025), he leaves broad bands at the edges unpainted, framing the scene while asserting the material's presence. The exposed bark cloth shows holes, warps, and a rugged grain—the marks of hand preparation he learned from his grandfather Gregorio, who used *llanchama* for clothing and hammocks. Viewers are reminded that painting, as a Western art form, represents only one chapter in a longer Indigenous history of working with fibre. Even in fully painted areas—such as the dark background of *Espíritu de brujo* (*Spirit of the Shaman*, 2024)—the grooved surface demands insistent applications of pigment, guiding the artist's hand. *Llanchama* is never merely a support—it is a living collaborator.

This exhibition is at once an introduction and a measure of achievement. The outstanding works gathered here consolidate decades of experiment and care, introducing New York audiences to a living practice in which technique, land, and memory speak with urgency to the present.

Written by **Horacio Ramos Cerna**

Santiago Yahuarcani

Santiago Yahuarcani (b. 1960, Pucaurquillo, Peru; lives in Pebas, Peru) is a self-taught artist who is an Indigenous activist and member of the Áimeni (White Heron clan) of the Uitoto Nation of northern Amazonia. His narrative paintings traverse cultural knowledge, Uitoto history and the rich biodiversity of the rainforest he calls home.

Yahuarcani's work is currently on view in a touring retrospective at the Whitworth in Manchester, UK, which will travel to Museu de Arte de São Paulo in Brazil and Museo Universitario del Chopo in Mexico City in 2026 and 2027 respectively. Notable past solo and two-person exhibitions include those at Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid (2024); and Centro Cultural Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Lima, Peru (2023).

Group exhibitions include the forthcoming *New Humans: Memories of the Future* at the New Museum, New York, USA (2025); *Amazonia Açú*, Americas Society: Council of the Americas, New York, US; 14th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2025); *Foreigners Everywhere*, at the 60th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2024); the 2nd Toronto Biennial of Art, Toronto, Canada (2024); and *Indigenous Histories*, MASP, São Paulo, Brazil (2023).

His work is held in prominent public collections of INSITE, San Diego, California, USA; Kadist, Paris, France; MASP, São Paulo, Brazil; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; Museo de Arte de Lima, Lima, Peru; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima, Lima, Peru; Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Tate, London, UK; the Whitworth, Manchester, UK; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.

CRISIS Gallery

CRISIS Gallery is a contemporary art gallery founded in Lima, Peru in 2017. The gallery represents a diverse group of Latin American artists whose practices engage with questions of history, ecology, and social imagination. Committed to fostering dialogue between local and global contexts, CRISIS has become a key platform for contemporary art from the region. In 2025, the gallery expanded its presence internationally with a new space in Madrid.