

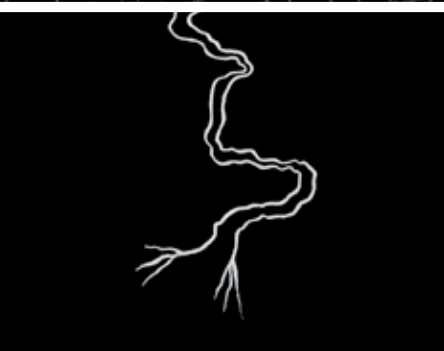
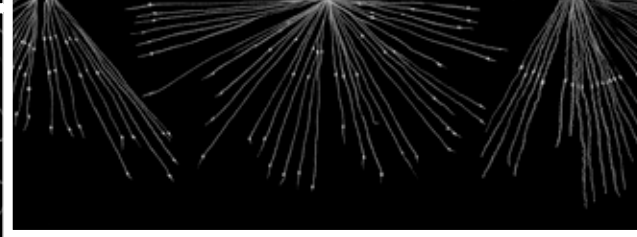
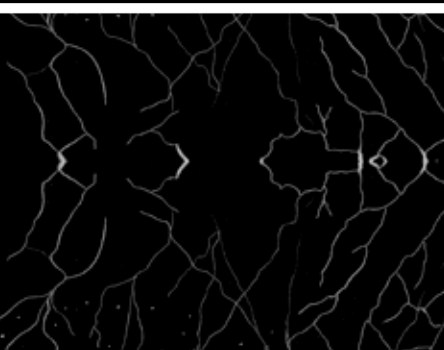
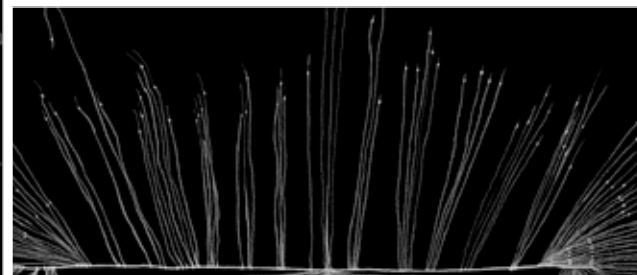
inter. pron.  
 How. ¿Imaykita-  
 saq? What part  
 dy will I cure?  
 asqanman hina  
 ay atina". What  
 o see the more it  
 ddle). "-Tutayay."  
 ¿Imanawank-  
 kasuptiy? What  
 o to me if I do  
 ou?

|| **Ima Sumaq!** How good/  
 excellent/beautiful!

**Ima.** 90. n. Thing. s. i. Llapa  
 qaway atina, llapa musyay  
 atina. All that we can see,  
 all that we can feel. ii.

ii. Mana ima. phr. Nothing.

**Imayna.** 247. inter. How?



For more and consult  
 life, knowledge and  
 the people

# Underground Blossomings: Serpentine thinking with other beings

*Once they come to life, drawings live many lives. In one life, they become resonant ornamental beings, linking forms and embroidering meanings in layers, transforming us with the energy they radiate. In a second life, drawings are theoretical reflections that intertwine with political activism and the lived experience of the spaces we share. In a third life, drawings are sewing tools that help us to assemble patterns without fully merging the sewn parts. In a fourth life, drawings act as flowers, producing pollinating meaning that keeps systems in motion. Drawings offer all these lives and more, being a spiritual material capable of transfiguration.*

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In the midst of the current conditions of a pandemic that continues to hit hard (particularly the heirs of social injustice—the racialized, poor, and Indigenous populations), the need to confront social and ecological challenges is urgent. What can art and aesthetic theory contribute to these challenges in relational thinking, doing, and feeling? What paths could drawing open for reflecting about our practices of political relationality to other forms of life and ways of being in the world?

## **Openings for nurturing worlds**

In this work, I collect the outcome of research into drawing as a method for reflecting on our practices of political relationality to other ways of being in the world. The findings were experienced as lessons gathered in interactions

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**Left column (top to bottom):**

Imayna Caceres: *Volcanoes as reminders of earth, being in constant regeneration*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *Maps of the Amaru*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *Parted Tongues: Who and How?*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *Threads*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *River Roots*, 2020. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

**Center Column (top to bottom):**

Imayna Caceres: *Relatos Canción. Desdoblamiento Vegetantes*, 2020. 21 x 30 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Microcellular life*, 2019-2020. 30 x 40 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Khipu or Tying Woven Strands in Order to Remember Everything We've Ever Lived*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Ritual Technologies. The Offering*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm.

**Right Column (top to bottom):**

Imayna Caceres: *Thunders exploring rhythm*, 2019. 30 x 40 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *Underworld Journeys Through Bodies of Water*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *Relatos Canción. The political teachings of plants on the meanings of the pluriverse*, 2019. 21 x 30 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Constellations of Selves*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

Imayna Caceres: *The Teachings of Air*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm (detail).

with other beings, in certain situations and events. Once these teachings were materialized as thoughts, I searched for academic literature that I could weave myself into. I believe that academic discussion can no longer aspire to validity when the discussions about reality only happen between humans, in the absence of non-human agents of history that build reality along with us. And I see there is a change happening across different disciplines in regards to this. A growing awareness that all earth beings contribute to a history that is not solely human.

I reference my upbringing amid mestizo-Indigenous practices that stem from Amazonian and Andean worlds. Different from certain Western forms of knowledge production, they have long engaged with knowledge that is produced by non-humans. And so, by following this, I follow openings to ways of thinking with and through other worlds.

By incorporating drawing as a method, I depart from an understanding of aesthetics that is related to what already exists in a variety of dissident and communal practices, in their ways of living, thinking, doing, and being. Collective work that challenges the fundamental narratives of modernity and has been expanding our knowledge of other aesthetic histories. With this I also want to suggest that the modern hegemonic configurations of aesthetics as a system that judges art and values what is good and beautiful—and worthy of admiration, representation, and meaning—has coexisted from the beginning with other histories, practices, and relationalities. In this sense, it is possible to think of aesthetics as a fabric that has been produced with threads of human and non-human stories.

In this research, I am involved with different fields of knowledge. To this end, I employ methodologies that mimic those of non-human beings. In everything I do, draw, sound, write, dance, or protest, there is a wish to create a connection to a knowledge of ourselves as cyclical beings in a cosmically interconnected pluriverse. This work has also benefitted from my ongoing dialogue with diverse sources: the history of ancestral art in Peru and the Americas, with its alternative uses of ritualist, artistic methodologies for living together; the reference to life in the work of Peruvian artists, poets, and musicians; the cosmivision of Amerindian peoples which acknowledges the agency of the world as a living being; and my experiences as a being who is part of a larger cosmic kinship.

I pay attention to the methods and teachings of other beings that reveal fundamental questions about the life we live. I incorporate what I've learned from the processes of life giving, depletion, care, and repair. And I am attentive to the ways in which other beings communicate, through dreams, visions, and spiritual experiences.

Through the practice of drawing I make sense of my history, growing up in Peru, revisiting ways of existing that have not been represented or have lacked resonance in what was described as modern culture. Drawing acts as a ground for relating to our multiple identities and possible readings of history. In the absence of material documentation, it emerges as a compensating weaver of traces of affection, restoring that which is cherished or deemed necessary to be remembered.

In my reading, I am accompanied by conceptualizations of ontological openness that speak with the political worlds of the South (Blaser 2011, De la Cadena 2015). I am guided by autohistoria as a border-thinking methodology (Anzaldúa 1987, 2015), in which the act of giving meaning to oneself provides a platform for collaborative forms of meaning-making (Pitts 2016, 357), and by *sentipensar* or feeling-thinking (Escobar 2018) that highlights the importance of subjectivity in the construction of worlds and that emphasizes that reason and science are not exclusive in the construction or interpretation of worlds, since this is also done from the senses. The political ontological projects I cite speak of a world of many worlds, which decentralizes human narratives and reckon the openings that this entails.

I venture that one way to think about how we relate to the planet might consist of paying attention to the instances of connection, which I refer to as knottings, between aesthetics as ways of being in the world, autohistoria, and practices of political relationality with other forms of life.

### **Roots in the Dark**

I started working with the notion of the underground in my research through the guidance of a plant I received while I was pregnant. I received her as a present on my civil wedding in order to acquire the papers that allowed me to live in Austria, along a sticker that read “never marry for love.” Three months later, when she was already big, I left her outside on a sunny day only to find the next day that the night storm had cut her entire stem, as if with a knife, only leaving one centimeter above the soil. I took care of her and in the next weeks she not only recovered but propagated so fiercely that I had to place her in different pots. In this living together, I witnessed the diverse methods that she and other plants develop to continue thriving, and which they modify according to the particular conditions in which they find themselves. In dealing with plants, I dealt with roots, and entered the logics under which roots work.

I sought to manifest these lessons in my work *Geographies of Selves/Roots in the Dark*. Working with soil brought me to contest a common academic vocabu-

lary that equates “bringing light to darkness” to “bringing knowledge.” Between the teachings of soil and my observations in regards to the arduous process of growing life in the womb—feeling-thinking a new being that was taking shape in aqueous and porous darkness—darkness acquired a prominent place for knowing and understanding. This echoed with Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of darkness as “equated with matter, the maternal, the germinal, the potential.” But also with darkness as “identified with the negative, base and evil forces—and all these are identified with darkskinned people” (Anzaldúa 1987, 71). As I began to write and draw, a childhood memory came to the fore: I remembered nights when the Shining Path had exploded transmission towers, cutting electricity in the city. Walking through the blackout, I accompanied my mom to pick up my sister from the bus stop. In these nights, with help of the moon and stars, I learned to see in the dark and to distinguish the shape of my sister from afar. I learned to gather information in a new way, as faculties of alertness were strongly activated in my body during these times.

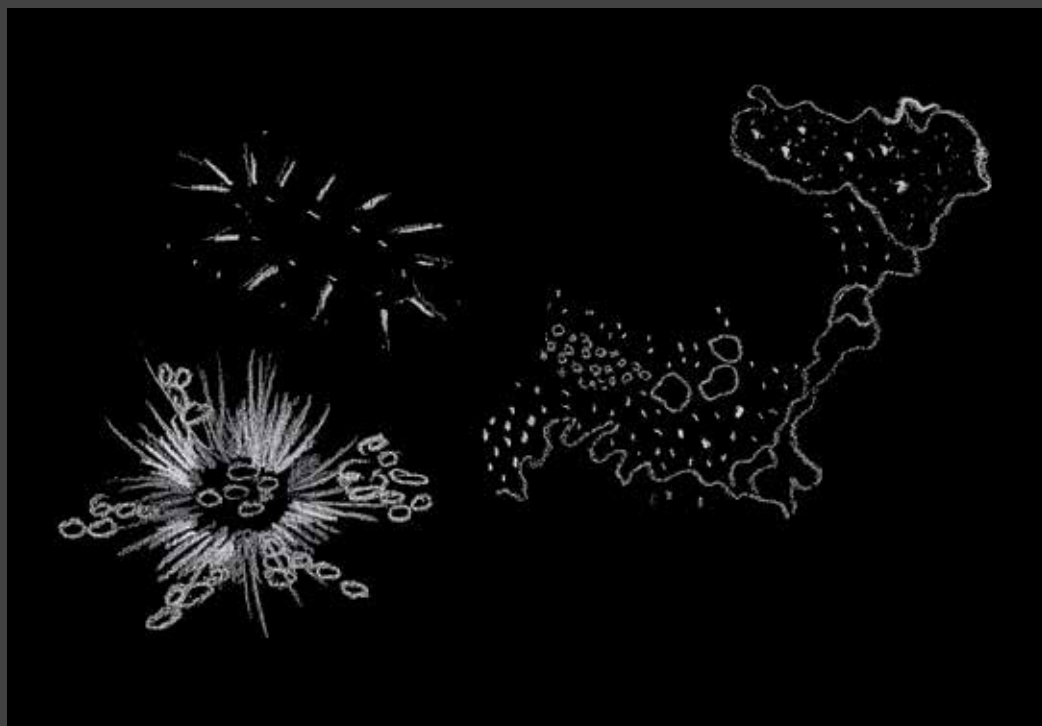
Working and thinking in/through the dark and with soil had made me aware of the porosities of matter beyond its quantic reality. The underground brought me to cosmologies of American peoples where the underworld is one of three realms: an upper world of the condor, a middle world of the puma, and an underworld of the Amaru. A mythical serpent in the mythology of Amazonian and Andean peoples, the Amaru is a symbol of vital energy. Like a winged river she comes down from the mountains and buries herself deep into the underground. She inhabits dry and wet lands, high and lowlands, and inspires us with the possibility of crossing borders and moving outside of fixed realms. As a force of life and latent energy, or potential, her skin shedding reminds us of cyclical renewal, healing, rebirth, and transformation.

In working on *Underground Blossomings* (2019-2020), drawing manifested as co-laborative thinking (employing the wording of De la Cadena 2017, 28) that was both analysis and intuition, poem and song. With the phrase “co-laborative thinking,” I mean to emphasize that I work with the teachings of non-human beings and more generally that our individual realizations are co-productions with other humans and other-than-humans. Drawings capture what earth-beings reveal in their inter-acting with us.

As a tool for the construction and interpretation of worlds, I experienced drawing as materializing in a liquid form, overflowing contemplated channels. But also, etherealizing the process of thinking and of sedimentation of knowledge.

Imayna Caceres: *Relatos  
Canción. Desdoblamientos  
Vegetantes*, 2020. 21 x 30 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Microcellular  
life*, 2019-2020. 30 x 40 cm.



In the process of my research, I recognized that drawing conceptual associative processes was an essential part of my making theory. Finding the resonance between my practice of drawing, my *autohistoria*, the multiple traditions of aesthetics that inhabit me, and my practices of political relationality with other forms of life, is part of what I describe as knottings. I envision these as an extensive web made of threads of different materials, thickness and colors, that is in constant expansion. Threads like rivers and veins. Cords that hold together and structure, but which also tense and break, creating gaps. Threads, loose or tightly curled, that share paths without merging or that interlace fully. I attend to these connections which, in bringing together different worlds, reveal something about their relationality.

I approached drawing expectant about what it could reveal as a method. Drawing connects us to a time of making, which is a time of deceleration and of grounding oneself in the rhythm of the present. Yet drawing can also be employed in deceiving ourselves into believing in the narrative of the genius who can create worlds from nothing. As we know from other traditions, making and creating carried associations different to the ones that are common today. The Quechua verb *camay*, as it was used in the *Huarochiri Manuscript* of the 16th century, “includes the notion of to make, although not to create from nothingness (as in ‘I made a cake from scratch’) but rather to take actions that cause or encourage something that already exists to express or manifest itself” (Moore 2014). In the modern idea of artistic creation, a contribution is valued by what has been made or achieved from “nothing,” this begs the question, is it possible to create something in absence of relation to others?

The more I drew, I realized that drawing teaches drawing, that the body learns and responds, and that the materials with which one interacts show what they best respond to as they act on each other. The more I drew and thought with/in/through drawing, the more I realized how it houses both re-generative and celebratory forms that connect with a joy of life in motion.

Grateful for this realization, I decided that these drawings had to be shown as part of a ritual offering to the Pacha. Bowls were arranged on the floor, filled with beans, coffee, maize, coca, and candles. The offering was a declaration of an invested desire for reciprocity with the relationalities we need to exist. While presenting my works on opening night, we sat on the ground as I shared the stories behind every work, which in turn led to a reciprocal sharing of experiences.

From such exercises, I came to consider drawing as a method to sustain resonant and intertwined dialogue with diverse traditions of plant teachings,

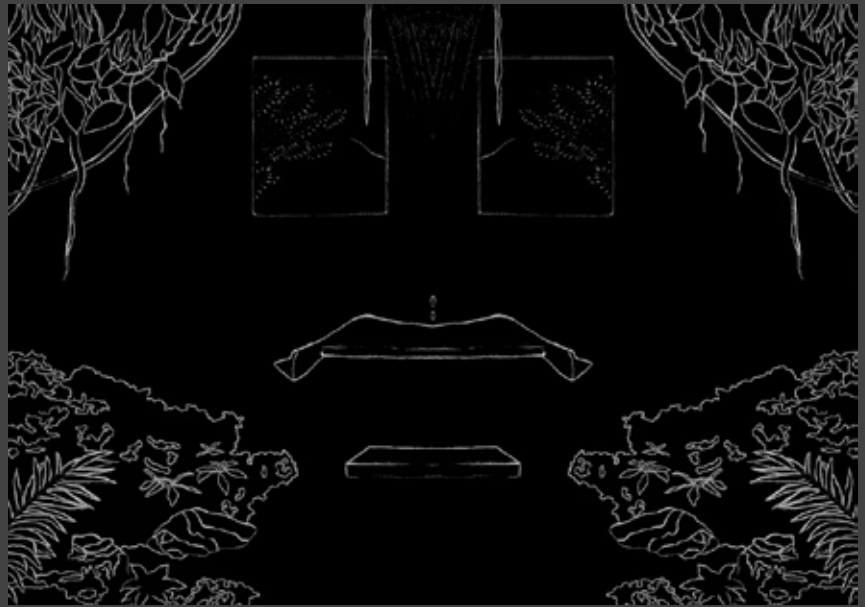
Indigenous and feminist wisdom and care, and scientific knowledge (Kimmerer 2013, De la Cadena 2015, Gagliano 2018). Throughout my research, drawing traces paths to ancestral connections and symbolisms. By way of drawing, I circulate through encounters and confluences that are human and other-than-human. Drawing offers a soil in which one can move between these fields from a subjective perspective that adopts personal experience, intuition, and collective undertakings. Channeling drawing as a soil, I am also interested in underlining the porosities of drawing and the permeability of aesthetics. As a soil constantly seeping with transformative practices.

In the following verses of Cesar Vallejo, consciousness and other capacities are ascribed to living entities like soil. He also references then contemporary Austrian literature, such as Freud's notion of "oceanic feeling," which resonated with what was proposed in his poem "Telluric and Magnetic" of 1932:

Soil theoretical and practical!  
Intelligent grooves!; example: the monolith and its companions! [...]  
When the earth stumbles against the technique of the sky!  
Outburst Molecule! Silky atom!  
Oh human fields  
Solar and nutritial absence of the sea,  
And oceanic feeling of the all!  
Oh climas encountered inside gold, ready!  
Oh intellectual field of the cordillera! [...]  
Family of liquens,  
Species in basaltic formation that I respect  
From this humblest paper! (Vallejo 1980, 87)

As mentioned before, the coexistence of diverse aesthetic traditions makes it possible to think of aesthetics as a fabric that has been made (albeit with differential relations of power) from the threads of different traditions and with other-than-human stories. My artistic practice is inscribed in a tradition of aesthetics as "ways of being, doing, and thinking," which Arturo Escobar phrases to talk about "designs for the pluriverse" (Escobar 2018, 191) that are in political relation with that which exceeds the human. A communal and collective aesthetics that *sentipiens* (feels-thinks) life as a persistence of plurification and diversification. And for which the artistic and the aesthetic is spiritual, social, and intertwined with all spheres of life.





A tradition that regenerates its objectives as connected to other ways of interexisting in the world in its variegated complexity, that expands its grasp of its origins and prehistory, that understands the human as having been artificially separated from “nature.” Ways of living implicated in an art whose spiritual, social, aesthetic purposes are intertwined, and that does not divide the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, or art from everyday life (Anzaldúa 1987, 88). Practices of a body-based knowledge that recognize kinship, heritage, and the subjectivity of different earth beings. These practices have accumulated hundreds of years of struggles to maintain an invested relationality with the whole of the cosmos. I am drawn to this tradition and the paths it holds to perspectives necessary to deal with the structural issues that we are facing. An aesthetics that *serpentea* towards a social, racial, and ontological justice.

### **Serpentine thinking across fields**

I arrived at my first ceremony of ayawaska (also known as *oni* to the Shipibo Conibo peoples of the Amazon) looking to meet and be in the presence of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*, while being led by a fifth generation Shipibo Conibo *onaya* or shaman. My conversation with plants gave rise to a form of work guided by the desire to listen to the visions of plants. The plants manifested themselves in my body initially by making the place around me look like water, with liquid edges that dissolved straight lines. Later my eyelids burned as if I were standing in front of a huge fire. In this first conversation, the plants communicated with images, specifically with outlines in a black space. These images showed me taking care of a plant that was my mother, which I later learned was a *Sansevieria Trifasciata Hahnii*, commonly known as a “snake plant.” The *icaros* chants of the *onaya* mediate the communication with the plants. These songs are as spiritual as they are practical since they can very well also help to heal bodily malaise. They are employed as “a way to collect and transfer practical learnings” as the rhythm researcher Victoria Santa Cruz reminds us. The communal roles of songs and sounds have been vigilantly maintained by the Shipibo Conibo, as well as by several other Indigenous of peoples (Santa Cruz interviewed in Feldman 2006, 67).

In the following months, the appearance of reptiles in dreams and visions emerging from chthonic worlds hinted toward revelatory unearthings. As with the *Amaru*, these reptilian kin presented the possibility to follow paths and forces that lead to a bursting across enclosed boundaries, transgressing gates and slithering between worlds. They were reminders that living across borders builds one’s faculties for mediating between the worlds with which we engage.

Imayna Caceres: *Relatos Canción. The political teachings of plants on the meanings of the pluriverse*, 2020. 21 x 30 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Lupuna, Master Tree*, 2019. 30 x 40 cm.

Taking grounded yet unexpected pathways and motions of action can also bring divergent and unforeseen results.

The impact of my experience with the plants of the *ayawaska*, further motivated me to rethink the role of plants in my *historia*. When I left Peru, I experienced the absence of the plants that I grew up with, and felt that something big was missing from my life.

Growing up, we practiced different types of ancestral rituals that are associated with Andean and Amazonian Mestiza-Indigenous wisdom. This also involved taking care of plants, which translates to paying attention to the needs of other beings in order to care for one's own needs. A practice of caring and being cared for by the plants one grows daily. Exercises in reciprocity, relational and mutual care, and of *cuidarse cuidando*, echo the Zapatist motto of *gobernar obedeciendo* or "rule obeying." Feeding, watering, taking care of a garden or orchard, means learning the needs of other beings—for sun and shade, for humidity and dryness, and their relationships of cooperation and survival.

This generative relationality maintains awareness of our radical interdependence, "one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, co-operation and social memory" (Moreton-Robinsons 2000, 16. Cited in Blaser 2011, 7). According to Blaser, in Indigenous relationality, fulfilment comes only through interactions with other elements, human and non-human, and "being well"—is therefore relational (Blaser 2011, 7-8).

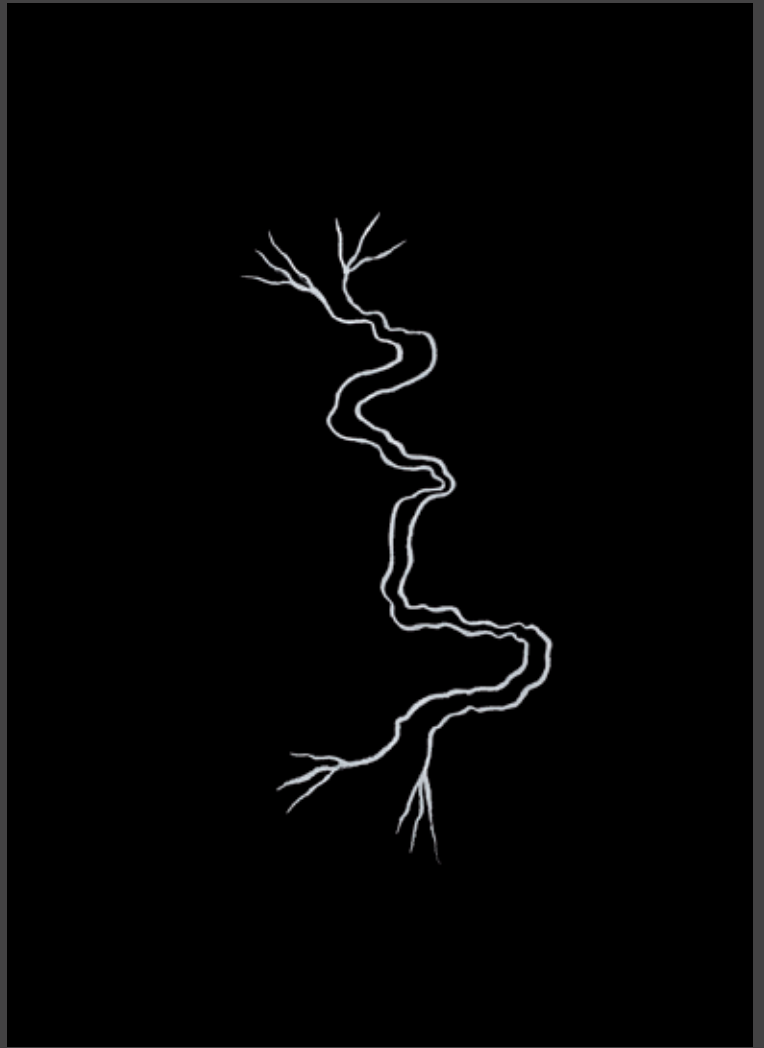
Caring for plants also means learning how to mend and repair. Damaging consequences arise when too little care is given. This is part of our relationality with other beings, and in acknowledging this, one learns how to develop remedial actions to repair the hurt. Care, outside of vertical relations of power, manifests as a way of learning—of making sense of reality and finding meaning. Those whom we care for teach us through their being, and we learn through witnessing what life needs to exist.

What caring for new life has taught me is that in the cumbersome repetition of the tasks of care lays the self-knowledge of our existence. Aiming for social justice means understanding that practices of care are essential for our re-connection to the ecosystems to which we belong. (For an extended research on matters of care, see the work of Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

This relationship to plants extends to the spiritual realm. We carry the seeds of *wayruro* (*Ormosia coccinea*) against the evil eye and *el susto* (*soul fright*), which is caused by a strong look or being "looked at too much by too many people." We light tobacco inside our homes for the *ekeko* to bring good luck to our economy.

Imayna Caceres: *River Roots*,  
2020. 50 x 70 cm.

Imayna Caceres: Imayna Caceres:  
*Parted Tongues: Who and How?*,  
2019. 50 x 70 cm.



**Ima.** 57. interr. pron.

What or How. ¿Imaykita-taq hampisaq? What part of your body will I cure?

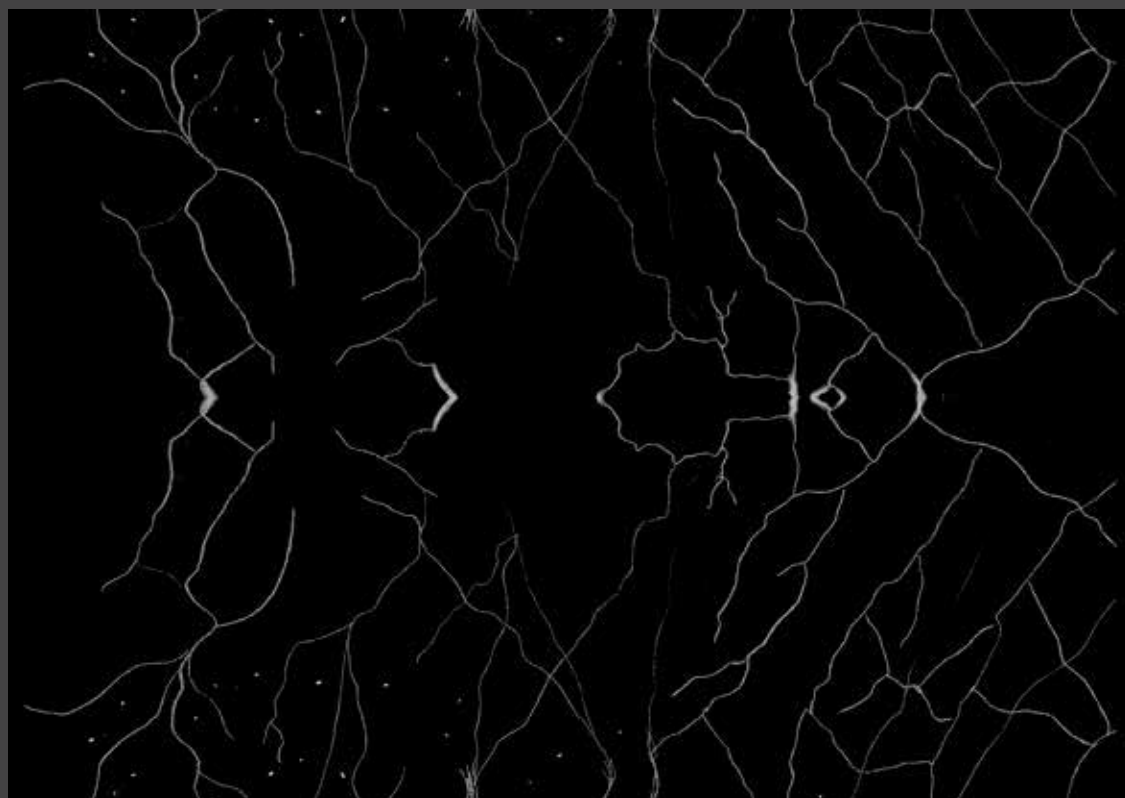
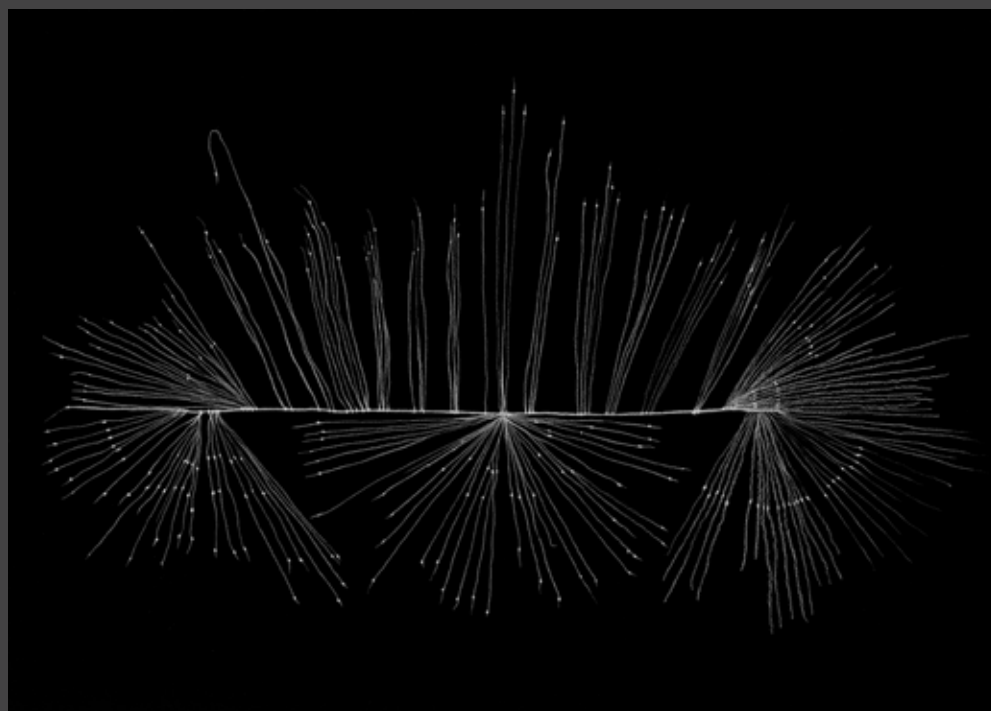
|| **Ima Wiñasqanman hina mana qaway atina**“. What is harder to see the more it grows? (Riddle). “-Tutayay.” The **night**. || ¿Imanawankitaq mana kasuptiy? What will you do to me if I do not obey you?

|| **Ima Sumaq!** How good/excellent/beautiful!

**Ima.** 90. n. Thing. s. i. Llapa qaway atina, llapa musyay atina. All that we can see, all that we can feel. ii.

ii. Mana ima. phr. Nothing.

**Imayna.** 247. interr. How?



We receive *limpizas* with bundles of herbs to repel damaging energies. We sow seed-petitions welcoming the new year and bathe in the flower-infused waters of *florecimientos*. We hang aloe vera with all its roots on the door frame to protect us, and we place the San Pedro cactus as a guardian plant in the garden. In this manner, it can be said we recognize a pantheon of plants to whose care we entrust ourselves.

These strategies employed by my family were applied as tools of care and as a means of keeping us safe during difficult economic and political times. The idea of plants as beings that can protect us is in line with understandings that consider plants as our older relatives, ancestors who have accumulated knowledge, and who possess awareness, will, and subjectivity. When asked how they learned to heal people, shamans commonly report that all they know has been taught to them by the plants themselves.

Growing up amid practices that revolve around the active participation of plants as guides, I have learned to understand the ritual as a political technology of reciprocity and (re)linkage between species: a practice of horizontal aesthetics that is used communally as a tool of mutual recognition of other species and worlds. This ritual acknowledgement of the function of others in my life is an important tool to question fetishist processes of alienation in capitalism, of deterritorialization, of the state sanctioned legal order, and an important tool for making communal sense.

In the sciences that study plants, there has been a paradigm change in the last decade regarding how plants are perceived and what questions can be asked about and to them (for instance in the fields of neurobiology or bioacoustics). As part of her research, the plant bioacoustics researcher Monica Gagliano engages in ritual encounters with plants. This guides her scientific experiments which show how plants make decisions, learn, relate, and communicate. She elaborates from her two-folded research that communication occurs through an “enormous vocabulary of bodily postures, elusive gestures, loud colorful displays, fleeting acoustic and chemical utterances, and barely palpable electromagnetic embraces used by all living forms, including us” (Gagliano 2015). Through shapes, colors, smells, sounds, and behavioral choices, plants share their personal stories and inspire us to reenvision the world (Gagliano 2018, 106).

### **Transformative porosities**

The stories and methods that emerge from different cosmovisions contribute to my research, and the results of each attempt at understanding are carefully tied to the rest of the theoretical-practical body. As I weigh these personal-collective

Imayna Caceres: *Khipu or Tying Woven Strands in Order to Remember Everything We've Ever Lived*, 2019. 50 x 70 cm.

Imayna Caceres: *Threads*, 2020. 30 x 40 cm.

experiences and the interrelations between them, I reflect on the seed lessons. In this scenario that recognizes the power of the spiritual, the black paper where I draw is then envisioned as a portal between worlds of past, present, and future and as a fragmentary mapping of underground worlds. Underground like the world that sustains much of the universe of plants, as well as the universe of the dead and our ancestors. The world of roots, and the porous darkness of the subsoil. Physically and metaphorically akin to roots, the underworld is also the place of the subconscious.

In writing about our knowing habits, De la Cadena proposes that “slowing down our practice of knowing (events, relations, practices, entities) [...] could challenge what we know and the ways we know it” (De la Cadena 2015, 31). She notes there are things that sometimes exceed what we know, that exceed our experience and competence because they are perhaps unknowable to us (De la Cadena 2015, 31). I find it helpful to picture that perhaps working between different disciplines, among transpositions and translations, could be of aid in this deceleration of our practice of knowing. Assuming the prospect of unknowability exposes the “distance” of that which we labor to give an account of and to make known to others through our research.

Shifting between disciplines and traditions of knowing creates bridges that contribute to the care of the teachings from/of other worlds. Serpentine thinking winds between parallels and divergences, between established practices and traditions, and offers the chance of rethinking what we seek to understand through our questions.

We have taught ourselves that thought and understanding (especially in academia) happens in an intra-species soliloquy, in which we humans teach and learn solely from ourselves. But if the taxonomies and dichotomies that underlie our understanding of reality (such as nature/culture) are inaccurate and confounding, then we can bring to life the many other worlds that we have hitherto ignored. Transmuting our perception of what is valid as thought could motivate us to more complex ways of making sense of reality.

In weaving the heritages of diverse fields, art manifests itself as a political practice that houses multidimensional forms of understanding. Contributing to the reconfiguration of a new consciousness which sinks its roots in a multiplicity of worlds.

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*Imayna Caceres's contribution has been peer reviewed.*