



Los caminos de la presencia wichí [The paths of the Wichí presence],
2024, hand-spun chaguar fibre, woven in yica stitch,
69 1/4 x 99 1/4 in (175.7 x 251.9 cm).

52 WALKER ST | APR 11 – MAY 10, 2025

Claudia Alarcón & Silät

James Cohan is pleased to present the first New York solo exhibition of **Claudia Alarcón & Silät**, a collective of artists from the Wichí communities of northern Salta, Argentina, on view at the gallery's 52 Walker space from April 11 through May 10, 2025. The exhibition features new textile works exploring celestial themes. James Cohan will host an exhibition walkthrough and talk with curator Andrei Fernández on Friday, April 11, at 5 PM, followed by an opening reception from 6-8 PM.

Claudia Alarcón (b. 1989, Argentina) is an Indigenous textile artist from the La Puntana community of Wichí people of northern Salta. Alongside her individual practice, she leads the Silät collective, an organization of one hundred women weavers of different generations from Wichí communities in the Alto la Sierra and La Puntana region.

Wichí society is clan-based and matrilineal. Weaving with hand-spun vegetal fibers from the local chaguar plant has been a communal, female-led activity for centuries, and is fundamental to the visual culture, narrative history and economics of the Wichí people. The centrality of weaving to the Wichí communities is articulated in a mythological tale in which women, living in the sky as stars, would travel down to earth on woven chaguar ropes

to dine on the fish caught by fishermen. Upon discovering this, the men employed the help of birds to snap the ropes and the women were trapped on earth for evermore but continued to weave and pass the knowledge from the world above onto their daughters. This parable suggests a passage from the naivety and freedom of childhood to the societal responsibilities of adulthood; girls are taught to spin chaguar and weave functional objects from the age of 12, their creations a way to provide financially as well as to sustain ancestral cultural practices. In another sense, learning to weave presents a further awakening, an entryway into a collective conversation between the women of the Wichí communities. The textiles, formed of geometric motifs drawn from the surrounding environment, are a method of communicating unspoken thoughts within a culture that highly values forms of non-verbal expression, and the messages found within dreams and subconscious intuition.

The Silät collective emerged from the Thaí/Viene del monte organization, a wider public project aimed at reviving ancestral textile traditions across the Salta region. Coordinated by Alarcón and working closely with curator Andrei Fernández since 2015, Silät explores the possibilities of artmaking within and beyond these traditions. The collective have evolved established techniques into new forms, producing large-scale images that exploit the textural intricacies and earthy colours of chaguar yarn and natural dyes. In coordinating the production of the Silät collective and leading experimentations in material and subject matter within their practice, Alarcón supports creativity, independence and self-sustaining practices, and provides a means for women across generations to transmit a contemporary indigenous culture into the webs of international art dialogues, beyond ethnographic readings.

This exhibition presents Alarcón and Silät's contribution to the rich tradition of South American geometric abstraction and highlights the ongoing significance of Wichí artworks to global modernism. Wichí artworks were a notable inspiration for Anni and Josef Albers, who traveled through Argentina in the 1930s and 40s—Anni Albers' personal collection of textiles from the region directly show the influence of these spatial principles and weaving techniques on her own practice.

The communal works in the exhibition are made with the classic *yica* stitch, which is characterized by a meshlike weave reminiscent of a spiderweb. This stitch is most prevalent in Wichí weaving, namely for its use in making *yicas*—practical, crossbody bags used in everyday life to carry personal items and food. For this exhibition, Alarcón and Silät created the installation *A chorus of yicas*, 2024-2025, which features one hundred of these woven bags and acts as a visual representation of each of the women in the collective. While *yicas* have their functional use, they also have a larger significance for the Wichí as a metaphorical vessel for personal and collective narrative.

Two additional works in the exhibition created solely by Alarcón employ a historically significant method of weaving known as the antique stitch. A tightly woven and thus time-consuming stitch, the antique stitch was beginning to disappear in the area where Alarcón lives, as younger generations were discouraged from continuing these textile traditions due to economic pressures. Aptly titled by Alarcón, *Following the trail of ancestral knowledge*, 2025, and *Our strength is to unite!*, 2024, these works and the tradition they celebrate serve as hopeful and reinvigorating promises to the preservation of Wichí art and culture.

Claudia Alarcón (b. 1989, La Puntana, Salta, Argentina) and **Silät** (Argentina, collective formed 2023) will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, UK and in the upcoming group exhibition *Arts of the Earth* at the Guggenheim Museum of Art in Bilbao. Their work is currently featured in the 14th Mercosur Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Alarcón and Silät's work has been included in major international presentations, among them *Stranieri Ovunque - Foreigners Everywhere* at the Venice Biennale (2024); *La vida que explota*, MALBA-Puertos, Buenos Aires (2024); *Spin a Yarn*, Guild Hall, NY (2024) and Another Space, NY (2023); and *Cantando Bajito: Chorus*, Ford Foundation, NY (2024). In December 2022, Alarcón became the first indigenous woman to be awarded a National Salon of Visual Arts prize by the Ministry of Culture in Argentina. Alarcón was also awarded the Ama Amoedo Acquisition Prize at Pinta Miami in 2022. Works by Alarcón and Silät are in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; MALBA Collection, Buenos Aires; Museu de arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP); Minneapolis Institute of Art; and Nasher Museum of Art, Dunham, NC, among others.

For inquiries regarding Claudia Alarcón & Silät, please contact Isabella St. Ivany at istivany@jamescohan.com or 212.714.9500.

For press inquiries, please contact Sarah Stengel at sstengel@jamescohan.com or 212.714.9500.