

Eariki Chonon Bensho

Contemporary members of the Shipibo-Konibo nation usually have two names: one that they use publicly and that appears in official documents, which they call *nawan jane* (mixed or foreign name), and another in their mother tongue, which they call *janeikon* (legitimate or true name). Until very recently, regional authorities and the urban population mocked indigenous names and did not admit them in public records; many Shipibo, affected by discrimination, used to hide them. However, since 2014, and coinciding with the start of her artistic studies, Chonon Bensho decided to present herself with her Shipibo name; this comes from her ancestors, who were wise doctors and skilled artists, and translates poetically as “swallow of the medicinal fields.” Chonon says that when she first started using it, even some indigenous politicians made fun of her; today, however, more and more Shipibos are presenting themselves with their *janeikonbo* and even, like Chonon herself, some register their children in the RENIEC (National Registry of Identification and Civil Status of Peru) only with an indigenous name.

The reflexive and creative origin of this exhibition, titled *Eariki* (“I am”), was the judicial process that Chonon Bensho filed with the RENIEC since 2021 and that still does not end. With the help of lawyer Rossana Maccera, Chonon filed the lawsuit to change her name on official documents and use the name given to her by her grandparents at birth. However, her request was rejected in the first instance; on that occasion, the RENIEC representative evidenced racist attitudes and suggested that she use her indigenous name “as a nickname or artistic pseudonym”. Chonon and her lawyer, outraged, filed an appeal; and her lawsuit was successful in the second instance in 2023. However, due to delays in the notification of the sentence, the file has not moved from the Second Chamber of the Judicial Court; for this reason, Chonon still cannot change her name on her identity documents. Chonon’s is the first lawsuit filed by an indigenous woman against RENIEC to use her Shipibo name on official documents and may lead to important changes for the new generations of Amazonian peoples.

In *Eariki*, Chonon Bensho exposes a fundamental problem: the lack of recognition, by the modern States of the region, of the indigenous nations as linguistic groups, and culturally different from the projects of nationalism. Chonon’s gesture, however, should not be read as a rejection of modernity or as a radical “decolonization”; rather, from the moment a person litigates against the state through institutional means, they are accepting and assimilating its dynamics of negotiation. Chonon’s political proposal, therefore, is not a dream of returning to the way of life of her ancestors, nor is it a denial of the transformations brought about by the expansion of modernity. Rather, it is about finding a way to participate in modernity and to be recognized as a citizen with full rights, without losing her indigenous roots and her cultural differences with national and global society.

At the aesthetic level, *Eariki* makes an appropriation of technical reproducibility, to produce an indigenous art in dialogue with pop and social realism. Different images printed on fabric (maps of Peru, Identity Documents, passports, photographs and a 19th century illustration of a Konibo couple), are semantically modified by the artist by embroidering them with *kené* designs, which are a primordial symbol of the identity of the indigenous nations of the Pano family. In this way, in *Eariki*’s proposal, the industrial procedure, which allows for serial printing in different colors, coincides with the craft of embroidery: the *kené* is transformed in its contact with reproducibility; likewise, the manual and affective wisdom of Shipibo embroidery also modifies the technical images: nothing pretends to remain as something “uncontaminated” or purely indigenous, but rather Chonon assumes with awareness and critical capacity the antinomies imposed by hegemonic modernity. And, at the same time, it proposes alternatives to escape cultural homogenization. In this way, *Eariki* aims to celebrate a heterogeneous, Amazonian and indigenous modernity, in which participating fully in modernity does not imply ceasing to be Shipibo-Konibo.