

## From Colombia, work that defines both a country and its culture



SUSANA MEJÍA

The exhibition entitled *Waterweavers: The River in Contemporary Colombian Visual and Material Culture* takes us to a part of the world with a rich and complex culture that has been little investigated. It is an ambitious, intricate, and multifaceted exhibition curated by José Roca, on view from April 11 to August 10 at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in New York. *Waterweavers* explores the many ways in which art, craft, and design intersect not just with each other but also with the cultural and natural environment of Colombia.

The organizing element of the exhibition is the river, and it is not just a concept. Seven rivers flow through Colombia—the Amazon, Bogotá, Cauhinari, Cauca, Magdalena, Putumayo, and Ranchería—and play a powerful role in the country's turbulent black market economy. The river is



ALVARO CATALÁN DE OCÓN

both a symbol of the strife that has dominated Colombia's recent history and a source for the vast and remarkable creative output that has resulted from it. Set against a backdrop of conflict, the exhibition features seventeen artists who work in a wide array of mediums (including fiber, video, rubber, and clay) and ranges from works on paper to furniture and installations. The objects on view look at indigenous, traditional, and contemporary craft and intertwine natural and industrial materials ranging from discarded plastic bottles to bamboo roots. (Those who visited the Cristina Grajales Gallery this winter were privileged to preview a portion of the exhibition, weavings and beadwork from the Bogotá-based atelier Hechizoo.)



ALBERTO BARAYA

Roca—the Estrellita B. Brodsky Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art at Tate Modern and artistic director of FLORA Ars+Natura in Bogotá—has taken a distinctive curatorial approach here that he terms “figure/ground,” meaning that the galleries at Bard have been transformed into immersive environments to provide context and contrast for the objects on view.

In conjunction with *Waterweavers*, the Bard Graduate Center will show in its Focus Gallery an exhibition devoted to *chuspas* (woven bags from the Andes) entitled *Carrying Coca*, as well as an accompanying catalogue entitled *Waterweavers: A Chronicle of Rivers*. An additional gallery guide is in the form of an art project from the visual artist María Isabel Rueda that takes the form of drawings based on the mythological origins of Colombia's rivers accompanied by interpretive texts. [bgc.bard.edu](http://bgc.bard.edu)

— Beth Dunlop