Nature is not mute, but modern man is deaf. - Terence McKenna

(Food of the Gods, 1992: 179)
Pablo Amaringo’s (1938-2009) series of landscapes, that have come to be known as ayahuasca visions, look like Edenic paradises. Los Cachiboleros (fig. 1), for example, is densely-populated with flowers, vines, leaves and trees, and teeming with a myriad of coexisting human, animal, vegetal, hybrid, celestial and un-earthly beings. The highly saturated paintings depict the artist’s otherworldly visionary experiences, after ingesting the entheogenic brew ayahuasca. This sticky, foul-tasting tea consists of a combination of the banisteriopsis caapi vine (fig. 2) with one of a number of hallucinogenic plants such as psychotria viridis. For millennia, the indigenous population of the Amazon has used ayahuasca. The brew, which is said to have a heady essence reminiscent of the forest, contains the most potent psychoactive compound known, DMT (N,N-dimethyltryptamine). Consuming it induces violent gastrointestinal purging and spectacular

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visions. In 1985, Amaringo began painting these visions, making his internal experience visible to the external world for the first time. As such, the psychedelic aesthetics that resulted have been viewed as insights into the rich visual landscape of ayahuasca. In this narrow interpretation, the subject matter of the paintings comes from the imaginary realm, far removed from the physical experience.

However, underneath the layers of fantastical imagery, reality pervades Amaringo’s paintings. ‘Reality’ is notoriously difficult to define, and debates about its nature have formed an entire branch of metaphysics, known as ontology. Considering its multivalent interpretations and problematic associations with truth, this essay defines it as that perceived to exist objectively. When the paintings are viewed closely, small details relating to the global ecological crisis begin to emerge from the dense jungle undergrowth. This crisis is being propelled by the current carbon-dependant Anthropocene epoch defined by deforestation, polar melting, rising of sea levels,

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7 DMT is endogeneous in humans, and thought to be produced in the pineal gland and released in during birth, psychotic crisis, near-death experiences and death. Strassman, DMT, p. 69. When taken orally it is easily deactivated in the stomach by monamine oxidase (MAO). However, the alkaloids provided by the *banisteriopsis* plant function as MAO-inhibitors, keeping DMT active and allowing it to be absorbed into the bloodstream. Wylie, *Frontier*, p. 183; Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic Tea*, p. 1; D. B. de Araujo, et al., ‘Seeing With the Eyes Shut: Neural Basis of Enhanced Imagery Following Ayahuasca Ingestion’, *Human Brain Mapping*, published online in Wiley Online Library, 2011, pp. 1-11 <http://www.iceers.org/docs/science/ayahuasca/de%20Araujo%20etal_2011_Seeing_with_Eyes_%20Shut.pdf> date accessed 29/02/2016.


hurricanes, fires, desertification, biodiversity extinction, and pollution of air, land and water.\textsuperscript{11} This essay argues that the ayahuasca visions contain a latent ecological agenda. Firstly, it considers the scholarly and art-historical framework surrounding the paintings. This highlights how they have been marginalised and seeks to challenge their categorisation as outsider art. It then unearths overlooked details that reveal the paintings’ grounding in ecological issues. It examines how the Amazon rainforest provided the artist with a reverence for nature as well as exposing him to severe cases of environmental destruction. It deconstructs the prevalent theme of the rainforest in the paintings, showing that they are not simply utopian or otherworldly, but can be directly related to the deforestation. It will look at plant consciousness, agency, and the emerging evidence of links between ayahuasca and ecological oneness. Finally, the essay considers how Amaringo’s agenda is unfolding within the global context of increasing scholarly, pharmacological and popular interest in ayahuasca, and an awakening to the crisis towards which the planet continues to hurtle.\textsuperscript{12}

THE OTHERWORLDLY VISIONS OF AN OUTSIDER

The ecological concerns embedded within the paintings are not discussed in the literature surrounding Amaringo. The works were first introduced to the world in Ayahuasca Visions: The Religious Iconography of a Peruvian Shaman (1991), a collaborative publication between anthropologist Luis Eduardo Luna and Amaringo.\textsuperscript{13} The text focused on the mythology of the ribereños culture and attracted attention within the fields of anthropology, ethnobotany, and

\begin{itemize}
\item Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, 1991.
\end{itemize}
Yet, the paintings have received no consideration within art history. When content has been discussed, the focus has mostly been on the psychedelia and science-fiction iconographies, such as the spirits and spaceships. And whilst tales of the intrepid psychonaut are fascinating and deserve further study, the meaning of this imagery is nuanced and can tell another, very different story. Despite the artist having suggested that ecology was one of his key motives for painting the *visions*, such a connection has not yet been developed.\(^{15}\)

Within the existing art historical framework, Amaringo’s paintings are positioned in the category of *outsider art*.\(^{16}\) This peripheral paradigm describes works created outside of the social and cultural mainstream, by ‘artists’ more inclined towards their own inner world than the ‘art world’.\(^{17}\) Amaringo seems to fit the criteria perfectly.\(^{18}\) His paintings are aesthetically similar to the work of accepted *outsider* artists such as Minnie Evans (1892-1987) (fig. 3).\(^{19}\) They are original, in that they are the first to paint *ayahuasca* narratives. Moreover, Amaringo worked in isolation and

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\(^{15}\) However such a connection is implicit in Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 9, p. 21. Amaringo provided commentaries to the paintings included in both Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions* (1991), and Howard C. Charing and Peter Cloudsley eds., *The Ayahuasca Visions* (2011).


\(^{19}\) Minnie Evans’ work is collected by major galleries such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, see ‘Minnie Evans’, *Artists*, MoMa, <http://www.moma.org/collection/artists/7524> date accessed 28/04/2016.
was self-taught, as well as being a convict, a *mestizo*, and a shaman. The politically problematic link between his work and psychedelia pushes it further towards the fringe. Yet without this connection, his works may not have been considered of any interest at all. Even within the sub-category of *psychedelic art*, which has attracted a significant body of art-historical literature, a discussion of *ayahuasca art* is absent. Furthermore, it is easy to consider the colourful aesthetic of works, such as *Yacu Caballo* (fig. 4), in loaded terms like ‘primitive’, ‘crude’, ‘naive’ and ‘low’, highlighting that underlying biases are often brought to interpretation. But such frameworks of judgement could be socio-culturally constructed, and beneath them, the ecological value of Amaringo’s work remains. Amaringo sat the edges of both the indigenous tribal and the developing industrialised worlds as a *mestizo*. These were often incompatible, with the former embracing ‘animism’, a worldview that attributes a living soul to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomena, and the latter ‘anthropocentrism’, a contrasting viewpoint regarding humankind as the most important element of existence. From his subject position as an *outsider*, Amaringo had the perspective to see that the ecological crisis was threatening the centre of both spheres.

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Nonetheless, the term outsider is problematic in many ways.\textsuperscript{25} The exhibition Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art (1992) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) challenged the separateness of this art form, examining how outsiders influenced modernists firmly situated in the art historical canon.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, this essay challenges the categorisation of Amaringo’s work, demonstrating that it is not as alien to the artistic mainstream as the literature might suggest, by drawing parallels with so-called avant-garde and environmental movements that have become central to the narrative of Western art.\textsuperscript{27} The essay is also the first to take an ecocritical approach to Amaringo’s paintings. Ecocriticism, a recent addition to the plethora of art-historical methodologies, examines environmental issues in cultural practices.\textsuperscript{28} It emphasises the entwinement of ecological damage with already-existing patterns of social inequality in terms of geography, race, class, and gender, drawing together diverse strands of research.\textsuperscript{29} Without such a focus, the paintings’ latent ecological connotations can be overlooked and they remain internal, psychedelic, and otherworldly.


\textsuperscript{26} Carol S. Eliel and Maurice Tuchman, Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 1. Published in conjunction with the exhibition Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992. However, Parallel Visions received criticism, such as reducing outsider art to inspiration for insiders, see Ken Johnson, ‘Significant Others - Travelling Art Exhibition Mounted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art: ‘Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art’’, Art in America, 81, no. 6, June 1993, pp. 84-8.


THE SHAMAN-ARTIST AND THE RAINFOREST

The context of Amaringo’s life cultivated the environmental agenda that lies behind the paintings. In 1938, he was born in Puerto Libertad, a small settlement located deep in the verdant Peruvian Amazon.\(^{30}\) His family relied on the forest for survival, farming crops, fishing, hunting and gathering.\(^{31}\) In 1953, Amaringo moved to the Pucallpa, where he would remain and later paint his visions.\(^{32}\) His home and studio was wooden, modest, and surrounded by the forest.\(^{33}\) A comparison can be made to Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), who also spent time painting at a remote studio in the tropics (fig. 5). The evident similarities between the two figures complicate the outsider perspective on Amaringo. Gauguin is often considered to have been a pioneer of the symbolist movement, and highly influential to the French avant-garde, with some going as far as to claim that he ‘initiated the art of modern times’.\(^{34}\) Alike to Amaringo, he spent his early life in Peru.\(^{35}\) His works inspired by his experiences in Tahiti are surprising similar to Amaringo’s visions. In both Amaringo’s Huarmi Taquina (2005) (fig. 6) and Gauguin’s Mahana no Atua (Day of the God) (1894) (fig. 7) lush landscapes are formed in bright blocks of blue, yellow, red, pink and green. Further similarities include imagery of unspoilt nature, harmonious indigenous figures, semi-nude female forms, and central deities. Gauguin’s mythologised narrative tells of a desire to escape


\(^{31}\) Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, p. 21.


\(^{33}\) McKenna, ‘Early Encounters’, The Ayahuasca Visions, p. 4.


industrialising forces to a pristine paradise, a concern faced by Amaringo many years later back across the South Pacific.\(^{36}\)

Amaringo’s ecological agenda is evidenced by his work with the Usko Ayar school, which he founded in the 1980s.\(^{37}\) He taught students how to depict Amazonian plants, animals, rivers and people and their relationships, producing works similar to the landscape mural that can be seen in the photograph (fig. 8).\(^{38}\) The mission of the school, as established by Amaringo, was (and remains) the preservation and documentation of the ecosystem, indicating that it was one of Amaringo’s top priorities.\(^{39}\) At the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil, Amaringo was elected to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Global 500 Roll of Honour, in recognition his achievements in the protection and improvement of the environment through Usko Ayar (fig. 9).\(^{40}\) This is evidence that his agenda was recognised by external bodies. The school was located in Pucallpa, a city that was ‘little more than a village’ when Amaringo arrived in 1953, but quickly experienced massive growth.\(^{41}\)

In 1946, Pucallpa had only 4000 inhabitants.\(^{42}\) In 1961, it had 26,391, and in 1981, this had grown to 97,925.\(^{43}\) By 2005, the year in which Yacu Caballo (fig. 4) was painted, the population had bloated to 259,830.\(^{44}\) Major pull factors to the area were the abundant land and production opportunities, resulting in an economy revolving around the exploitation of local natural resources,


\(^{39}\) Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, pp. 29-30.


\(^{41}\) Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, p. 22.

\(^{42}\) Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, p. 23.

\(^{43}\) Luna and Amaringo, Ayahuasca Visions, p. 23.

including timber.\textsuperscript{45} Observing the human impact on the landscape, Amaringo spoke of how ‘The dirt road to the capital... cut right through the virgin forest, and it was an impressive sight to see... such immense trees growing by the roadside.’\textsuperscript{46} He expressed awe at how such tall trees (averaging around 25 to 30 m), were cut to the ground.\textsuperscript{47} Amaringo’s choice of the word ‘virgin’ in his statement is loaded, not only identifying the area as having been undisturbed old-growth forest, but also framing civilisation as an infringement upon the natural environment.\textsuperscript{48} Similarly, he nostalgically described how the forest ‘remained relatively intact’ during his early life in Pucallpa, implying that it would later experience destruction.\textsuperscript{49} In \textit{Yacu Caballo} (fig. 4), a \textit{Lupine Blanca}, one of the tallest trees in the Amazon, extends up and out of the left side of the composition. Amaringo painted ‘guardians’ in the act of protecting the tree, linking to the risk the species was facing in reality.\textsuperscript{50}

The Amazon is a site of folklore and mythology on the one hand and intense eco-political debate on the other. Therefore invoking the same paradox between otherworldliness and the ecological crisis that imbues the \textit{ayahuasca visions}.\textsuperscript{51} The region and the paintings are predominantly inhabited by flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{52} This is heightened by the ‘noisy’ features of the rainforest that are pictured, such as birds, insects and running water.\textsuperscript{53} Centuries of human


\textsuperscript{50} Amaringo, \textit{The Ayahuasca Visions}, p. 53.


intervention have made the Amazon the core of the planet’s deforestation problem.\(^{54}\) In Peru, despite new regulations from 1999 to 2005, new forest disturbances occurred at a rate of 632 to 645 square kilometres per year.\(^{55}\) Data indicates that 86% of this deforestation was concentrated in Pucallpa and the road network around the city (including the road described by Amaringo).\(^{56}\) This increased by 400% from 1999 to 2005, which happens to have been a particularly active period of painting for Amaringo.\(^{57}\) Much of the logging stemmed from the timber trade, which Amaringo would have witnessed whilst working at Pucallpa port.\(^{58}\) The logs were stockpiled here, as can be seen in Alex Webb’s striking photographs (figs. 10 and 11).

Pucallpa was, and remains, a violent hotbed of environmental issues.\(^{59}\) In this context Amaringo was exposed to illegal logging and other activities such as river pollution, slash and burn farming and animal agriculture:

> All human beings should … put effort into the preservation and conservation of the rainforest, and care for it and the ecosystem, because damage to these not only prejudices the flora and fauna but humanity itself. Even in the Amazon these days, many see plants as only a resource for building houses and to finance large families. People who have farms and raise animals also clear the forest to produce foodstuffs. Mestizos and native Indians log the largest trees to sell to industrial sawmills for subsistence. They have never heard of

\(^{54}\) Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 9.

\(^{55}\) Pinedo-Vasquez, et. al., *The Amazon Várzea*, p. xi.


\(^{57}\) Luna and Pinedo-Vasquez, et. al., *The Amazon Várzea*, p. xi.

\(^{58}\) Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 23.

the word ecology! I, Pablo, say to everybody who lives in the Amazon and the other forests of the world, that they must love the plants of their land, and everything that is there!\textsuperscript{60} Amaringo was familiar with the term ‘ecology’ and understood the crisis to be both global and anthropogenic (originating in human activity). This is supported when he later said, ‘I feel a great sorrow when trees are burned, when the forest is destroyed. I feel sorrow because I know that human beings are doing something very wrong.’\textsuperscript{61} The main causes of deforestation identified by Amaringo correlate with those established in scientific studies, suggesting that he was an informed and reliable observer.

Water consumption and pollution are further issues that Amaringo was likely to have been aware of. Christian Abizaid has shown that the course of the Ucayali was manipulated to improve transportation of goods and people, with unknown environmental effects.\textsuperscript{62} This is the river that Amaringo described seeing from his home when they moved to Pucallpa, and the river that fed Pucallpa port.\textsuperscript{63} The dynamism and porosity of water in Yacu Caballo (fig. 4) creates a visual slippage between humans and nature. A waterfall outlines two yacu huarmi (water women), and merges into a river. The river blends into the blue and white patterned clothing of the shamans riding the colourful head of a yucumana (giant snake) in the foreground (fig. 12). The medium of gouache allowed Amaringo to easily blend forms and blur the boundaries between human and rainforest. Yet, the paintings do not always depict this as a harmonious relationship. Tension becomes a key theme in paintings such as Los Cachiboleros (fig. 1) where human figures only occupy the right-hand corner of the composition and are overwhelmed by vibrant botany and all kinds of beings. This is evident in the detail (fig. 25) which shows a small figure with their back


\textsuperscript{61} Luna and Amaringo, \textit{Ayahuasca Visions}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{62} The human impact of this anthropogenic management has been the complete alteration of its course and the stranding of about a dozen villages and the town of Masisea. Abizaid, ‘An Anthropogenic Meander’, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{63} Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, \textit{A Hallucinogenic Tea}, p. 143.
turned from the viewer, reaching up towards an enormous plant which overshadows them. Amaringo stated that if we destroy the plants we ‘cannot survive’, we destroy ourselves because ecology entwines our fates.64

Amaringo’s concern for plants is also articulated in the foreword he provided for the book *Plant Spirit Shamanism* (2006), in which he constructs a powerful argument for their vital role in ecology,

Plants are essential in many ways: they give life to all beings on Earth by producing oxygen...they create the enormous greenhouse that gives board and lodging to diverse but interrelated guests; they are teachers who show us the holistic importance of conserving life. ...The consciousness of plants is a constant source of information for medicine, alimentation, and art, and an example of the intelligence and creative imagination of nature. ...Thus I consider myself to be the ‘representative’ of plants, and for this reason I assert that if they cut down the trees and burn what’s left of the rainforests, it is the same as burning a whole library of books without ever having read them.65

Amaringo challenges anthropocentric idea that humans are supremely intelligent. He even positions his work as ‘representative’ of plants, linking it to an agenda to discourage further deforestation. However, this source was not written in relation to the paintings, so the issue of whether his values translated into his art might be raised. Amaringo directly stated that he intended his art to be a ‘tool for the conservation of the Amazon environment.’66 Such an ecological stance comes across strongly, particularly in the meticulously detailed renderings of botany.

Each leaf, flower and stem is carefully crafted in the large canvas *Misterio Profundo* (fig. 13), so that they are identifiable as real specimens. For example, the bright purple leaves on the far right belong to a *lancetilla* (Alternanthera sp.). In an accompanying commentary, Amaringo described how this plant can be used to treat arthritis, alleviate stress and gastric problems, heal wounds and cure diabetes.67 The artist renders plant species with indigenous healing value that


are at risk of being lost. His experience as a vegetalista (a mestizo shaman deriving healing knowledge from plants) relates to these detailed descriptions of botany and likely to played a part in forming his ecological agenda. In his own words ‘A shaman has in his mind and heart the attitude of conserving nature’. Amaringo was further known as an ayahuasquero. The artist sang icaros (power songs which come from the plant) while painting and suggested that their healing action could be transferred to the viewer. This creates another link between conscious plants, ecology and the works, and suggests that Amaringo could have intended his paintings to heal the world. Plant consciousness is described by Amaringo: ‘Every tree, every plant, has a spirit. People may say that the plant has no mind. I tell them that the plant is alive & conscious.’ In Los Cachiboleros (fig. 1) an unblinking eye occupies each leaf in the cluster found in the left-hand corner, and seventeen black pupils peer out at the viewer. By giving a plant eyes, Amaringo suggests that it is actively aware of its environment; it is conscious.

Not all of the imagery in the ayahuasca visions is vegetal, and not all of the teachers are plants. In Misterio Profundo (fig. 13) a spaceship descends in the centre of the painting, and ethereal blue beings emerge from it (fig. 14). An interpretation of this scene could return us to a

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69 The term chamán or ‘shaman’ is a recent Western import into the Amazon in the past thirty years. Charing, The Ayahuasca Visions, p. 175.


narrative of the outsider, disconnected from issues of reality. Yet Amaringo’s commentary suggests otherwise:

The spaceship that has arrived from a distant galaxy brings spiritual beings to teach. ...They warn of the imbalance of the biosphere caused by man’s destruction of the rain forest. Through negligence, ignorance and greed, humans have prejudiced the delicate web of life on which we depend.

Again he challenges anthropocentrism, by creating an image that denies the supreme intelligence of humans, and attributing the global crisis to specific traits that focus on the Self. The web metaphor can be found in Untitled (fig. 15), in which a group of humans sit on a ‘delicate’ yellow web, connoting interconnectedness. One of the plants threatened within this global fabric is ayahuasca, and its ceremonies are a key iconographic feature of the paintings, such as in Las Nalpeas del Renaco (fig. 16). These scenes, where humans gather around a central cauldron, are a signal that we are not looking at conventional landscapes but ayahuasca visions. As a psychotropic substance, ayahuasca is the epitome of a conscious plant. To Amaringo, it was a powerful medicine and teacher. Ayahuasca is a crucial yet complex layer in the relationship between the paintings and ecology, whilst further blurring the boundaries between reality and vision. In another level of paradox, the imagery is both derived from plants and consciously about them.

AYAHUASCA LANDSCAPES

The woody, brown ayahuasca vine can often be seen winding its way around foliage in the works such as Genios del Renaco (figs. 17 and 18). Although they closely resemble the rainforest, the paintings represent what neuroscience refers to as spontaneous imagery narratives, and

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therefore they could be termed *ayahuasca* landscapes.\textsuperscript{78} The vertical strips dividing the composition in *Caspi Mutkiy* (fig. 19) represent richly patterned visions bleeding into one another. Although *ayahuasca* has become a popular topic of scientific enquiry, much remains to be understood about its nature. Cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon has observed that for *ayahuasca* drinkers colours reach luminous saturation and intensity, and objects radiate, shine and glitter.\textsuperscript{79} This might explain why, although the rainforest is a colourful place, Amaringo’s paintings are intensified to a pitch beyond what can be seen in the physical world. The subjects that are experienced can also be identified in Amaringo’s *visions*. Compiling results from studies by Shanon, Michael Harner, Claudio Naranjo on both indigenous and non-indigenous participants, identifies universal themes including plants and botanical scenes, naturalistic and non-naturalistic animals, entity encounters, distant cities, landscapes, personal material including one’s own death, oneness, scenes of creation and evolution, and geometric designs.\textsuperscript{80}

Such topics might seem far from issues concerning Amaringo, such as deforestation, but *ayahuasca* is actually closely linked to the rainforest. It is a combination of Amazonian plants that originated in animistic cultures.\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, *Ayahuasca* creates an ecological-self by shattering the separation between human and nature.\textsuperscript{82} The theme of oneness with the world is common.\textsuperscript{83} As


\textsuperscript{79} Shanon, *Antipodes of the Mind*, p. 274.


\textsuperscript{81} Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic Tea*, p. 144.


\textsuperscript{83} Cardeña and Winkelman, *Altering Consciousness*, p. 95.
one ayahuasca drinker commented ‘I feel part of the environment, not separate from it’. It has even been described as ‘a lesson in ecology’. Perhaps inspired by ayahuasca, the paintings break down the binaries of Self and Other. In Los Cachiboleros (fig. 1) green reptilian forms are composed entirely of plants (fig. 25), whilst in El Principe De La Vida (fig. 23) a woman, surrounded by leaves with distinct human faces, gives birth to a snake. Similarly, in Yacu Caballo, snakes pour down into the river. Following the snake on the right backwards, it winds around a tree until its body gradually becomes a vine, which eventually becomes branches (fig. 24). In the same scene, faces emerge in the bark of trees and jagged edges of the rock face form solemn features. Applying personhood to organic matter in such a way reflects brings ethics into the ecological debate. This may be accused of reinforcing anthropocentrism rather than rejecting it, since it insists on relating to human form in order to generate compassion. Nonetheless, the image is effective in encouraging an understanding of nature as a series of subjects and not just utilitarian objects. Furthermore, through this dismantling of the Self, as well the themes of nonlinearity, montage, and the challenging of binaries, the works resonate with post-structuralist and postmodern thought, creating a context for the paintings within art history that goes beyond modernism.

In addition to promoting environmental concern, ayahuasca oneness breaks down the Outsider Art paradigm. For a person to be an ‘outsider’ they must be Other. Oneness is a common feature in the mystical discourses of all major religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. For example, in Islam, the concept of wahdat al wujūd (unity

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86 In the context of shipibo mythology, this woman is likely to have the affliction boa chicuchisch (pregnant by boa). Amaringo, The Ayahuasca Visions, p. 28.
87 Hanson, Identity and Memory, p. 66.
of being) is central to Sufism.\textsuperscript{89} Such doctrines were often realised in mystical, meditative or altered states, alike to that induced by \textit{ayahuasca}, and have inspired diverse artworks. Given this context, the ecological and divine unity pictured in the paintings now looks to be much less of an ‘outsider’ idea, but rather one that central to human experience. Whilst the antithetical ideology of neoliberal capitalism, which goes beyond anthropocentrism to individualism, may actually be less central than it appears.\textsuperscript{90}

When Terence McKenna wrote about the effects of the entheogen, he could have been describing one of Amaringo’s paintings, ‘the world becomes an Arabian labyrinth, a palace, a more than possible Martian jewel, vast with motifs that flood the gaping mind with complex and wordless awe.’\textsuperscript{91} The validity of Amaringo’s \textit{visions} is supported through comparison with other psychedelic aesthetics. Graham Hancock and John Ryan Haule have compared Amaringo’s works to prehistoric rock and cave art, such as that found at Chauvet in France, thought to be by shamans experiencing altered states of consciousness around 32,000 years.\textsuperscript{92} However, Amazonian cultures provide a firmer comparison.\textsuperscript{93} The \textit{ayahuasca} art of the Shipibo tribe, with its striking red and black patterning, can be found in Amaringo’s iconography. For example, the vase in the foreground


\textsuperscript{91} Terence McKenna, \textit{Synthesthesia}, New York: Granary Books, 1992, p. 258. Although McKenna was describing experiences on synthesised DMT, it shares the visual, ideational, spiritual and consciousness related themes with \textit{ayahuasca}. Cardeña and Winkelman, \textit{Altering Consciousness}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{92} Graham Hancock draws parallels between these markings and the paintings, highlighting the ‘same themes, patterns, supernatural entities and symbols’ occurring in both. John Ryan Haule agrees, describing the parallels as both ‘striking and extensive’. Both are based on the premises established by Jean Clottes that the cave markings were made by ancient shamans inspired by altered states of consciousness. However, this lineage has issues and more in-depth research is needed to outline any potential connections. Graham Hancock, ‘Pablo Amaringo: A Special State of Consciousness’, \textit{The Ayahuasca Visions of Pablo Amaringo}, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 2011, pp. 10-11; Haule, \textit{Jung}, p. 34; Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, \textit{The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves}, Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1998.

\textsuperscript{93} Leslie Wylie has identified \textit{yagé} (another indigenous term for \textit{ayahuasca}) aesthetics such as fragmentation, non-linearity, heightened sensory perception and synaesthesia (union of different senses). Wylie, \textit{Frontier}, p. 183.
of *Misterio Profundo* (fig. 20) resembles Shipibo vessels (figs. 21 and 22). But Amaringo’s paintings are more representational than the abstract designs found in indigenous pottery and textiles. Interestingly, it is only after these paintings were made, that we begin to see similar iconography appear.

The reliability of the paintings as representations of the *ayahuasca* experience is largely agreed upon by scholars with extensive first-hand experience of the subject.\(^{94}\) Amaringo partly attributes his ecological concerns to the brew, saying that ‘When one takes *ayahuasca*, one can sometimes hear the trees cry when they are going to be cut down.’\(^ {95}\) This passage suggests that *ayahuasca* prompted the depiction of conscious plants. The image of suffering trees comes across powerfully in the paintings, such as in the anthropomorphic tree trunks stretching across *Untitled* (fig. 15). Automatism and agency are not issues that exist outside of art history but are central to *surrealism* and other *avant-garde* movements.\(^ {96}\) Increasing Amaringo’s agency (which is important if we are to consider his statements), is the fact that the paintings were produced consciously, unlike André Masson’s (1897-1987) automatic drawings or Joan Miro’s (1893-1983) paintings.\(^ {97}\) Amaringo did not produce the works whilst taking *ayahuasca*, but asserted that he had the ability to recall each of his visions, through chanting his *icaros*.\(^ {98}\) These did not alter his state of consciousness but acted as mnemonic devices recalling the visions, from which Amaringo would

\(^{94}\) The similarity to *ayahuasca* visions is asserted by Luis Eduardo Luna, Dennis Mckenna, Howard C. Charing, Peter Cloudsley, and others. Dennis Mckenna, for example, describes Amaringo as a ‘chronicler of the visionary world of ayahuasca’. McKenna was the first Western scholar to come across Amaringo and has completed research on the pharmacology, botany and chemistry of *ayahuasca* over the past thirty years. Similarly, anthropologist Jeremy Narby has said that the iconography strongly resembles his own *ayahuasca* visions. Whilst Luna has shown the paintings to many *vegetalistas* who say they have seen the same images themselves. McKenna, ‘Early Encounters’, *The Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 8; Narby, *Cosmic Serpent*, p. 60; Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 43. Haule, *Jung*, p. 36.

\(^{95}\) Luna and Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 34.


\(^{97}\) However, the issue of agency within *surrealist automatism* is also complex. Cardinal, *André Masson*, pp. 79-94.

select and collate iconography. *Ayahuasca* alone does not inspire such compositions. Unpicking the forces behind the paintings is, therefore, a complex process.

Further supporting Amaringo's agency, Ross Heaven challenged Howard Charing's assertion that Amaringo was a 'master communicator of the ayahuasca experience', rewording it to say that he was 'a master communicator of his own ayahuasca experience'. Additionally, it might be argued that direct translation of inner visions to outer imagery is impossible and requires manipulation from the artist, considering that the experience has been described as 'beyond the scope of language'. Roberto Venosa shared this concern,

As an artist, I know that it would take numerous life times to be able to paint the visions from just one *ayahuasca* journey ... I discussed this with Pablo and he agreed that there was not a canvas or palette large enough to capture the smallest iota of the overall Ayahuasca visual storm. This suggests that Amaringo compressed his visions in order to interpret them in paint. The thematic content Amaringo chose to amalgamate happened to be laced with ecological concern. The style, composition, medium and scale were selected by Amaringo. Therefore, it is clear that his motives played a role and should be considered. The paintings were informed by Amaringo's personal cultural and environmental surroundings, including the destruction of the rainforest.

**OUT OF THE AMAZON**

Due to the interrelated nature of ecosystems and the significance of the area, the Amazonian crisis feeds into the global event. The rainforest recycles the majority of the planet’s carbon dioxide and produces about 20% of our oxygen. Accordingly, Amaringo’s environmental statements addressed an international audience. Although many figures in the *ayahuasca visions* appear to be of Amazonian ethnicity, the works can be seen as globally-minded. Among the

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mestiza, Shipibo and Cocama healers in *In Connection With Healers in Time and Space* (fig. 26) is a meditating Hindu yogi, a Campa Indian, a female African healer and a Tibetan lama. They are all linked by their use or knowledge of plants. Each is visualised in the centre of a separate ecosystem, though their ripples move outwards towards each other, connoting a network. All of these biospheres are united in one composition, *in connection* with one another. Circles representing the Earth as a whole, are often found in the paintings, for example, the large central sphere surrounded by leaves in *Chacruna Versicum* (fig. 27).

Amaringo clearly intended his paintings to promote conservation of ecology. Although the reception of this message depends on the ecological awareness of the viewer, the works are being distributed in documentaries, films and the internet, on platforms which similarly argue for the preservation of flora, fauna and indigenous cultural practices. Amaringo's paintings have also been linked to increased popular interest in *ayahuasca* since the 1990s. A viewer without any knowledge of *ayahuasca* might be encouraged to take part in a ceremony after encountering the visions. They might then experience the dissolution of Self and anthropocentric ideas that come with *ayahuasca* and be more concerned about the global ecological crisis as a result. This would suggest that Amaringo's work is, in some ways, beginning to have the reception he desired, if not always consciously received in the mind of the viewer. Amaringo’s works have been exhibited in countries including the United States, France and Britain. The centre and periphery model of

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106 Although there are likely many other causes contributing to this surge in interest, which are not discussed, indeed it is likely that Amaringo’s visions have contributed to the phenomenon. Beyer, *Singing to the Plants*, np.; Beyer, ‘Shamanic Art’, *The Ayahuasca Visions*, p. 15.

outsider art becomes complicated when the outlanders operate within the museum system, as Amaringo did.\textsuperscript{108}

Art history is becoming more transnational and pluralistic, moving away from the meta-narratives that create insiders and outsiders.\textsuperscript{109} At the same time, environmental concerns are increasingly shifting towards the centre of public consciousness. Land and environmental art have been a significant part of art practice from the 1960s.\textsuperscript{110} Alike to Amaringo, these movements transformed the genre of landscape. Naziha Mestaoui’s 1 Heart 1 Tree is a contemporary interactive projection of virtual forests onto city spaces around the globe. Creating a sense of oneness with nature, the digital trees grow in rhythm with human heartbeats. A physical tree is grown for each virtual one, actively combatting deforestation with active planting in Peru among other places.\textsuperscript{111} The motives of the project are therefore strikingly similar to those found in the ayahuasca visions. Mestaoui’s 1 Heart 1 Tree beamed onto the Eiffel Tower (fig. 28) to open the United Nations climate change conference, known as COP21.\textsuperscript{112} The conference resulted in 175 countries signing the Paris Agreement on 22 April 2016, ‘International Mother Earth Day’.\textsuperscript{113} Placing Amaringo’s work, with its clear ecological message, into the category of outsider art now seems inappropriate.

\textsuperscript{108} Maclagen, Outsider Art, pp. 7-8


\textsuperscript{110} Kastler and Wallis, Land and Environmental Art, p.1.

\textsuperscript{111} The 1 Heart 1 Tree partners in Peru are Pur Projet and ACOPAGRO. ‘The Reforestation Programs’, 1 Heart 1 Tree, 2016, <https://www.1heart1tree.org/cop21/places> date accessed 23/04/2016.

\textsuperscript{112} The result of this performance was 53,254 trees being planted. ‘Live’, 1 Heart 1 Tree, 2016, <https://www.1heart1tree.org/cop21/live> date accessed 23/04/2016.

CONCLUSION

The *ayahuasca visions* series intended to connect people to nature in the face of the impending ecological crisis. Such an agenda was rooted in the particular environmental issues witnessed by the artist in Pucallpa, such as the violently controversial illegal logging trade, as well as in the *ayahuasca* experience. This ecological concern is embedded in the paintings in distinct ways. It is found in the vibrant and densely populated rainforest landscapes, with their meticulously rendered botanical specimens, identified as medicinal Amazonian plants. The plants have eyes, faces, bodies, and consciousness and therefore can no longer be seen in as inanimate objects. Similarly, hybrid forms transcend and dissolve the boundaries between Self and Other, human, animal, plant, nature. It is also found in the imagery of *ayahuasca* ceremonies, which encourage interest in the medicine and subsequent exposure to its ecologically-minded effects. And lastly, in the domination of nature over humanity, warning of its devastating power. The paintings and Amaringo’s statements appeal to a global audience, ultimately picturing the oneness of the ecological system.

Amaringo presented the animism of the indigenous Amazonian world as an answer to the anthropocentric one he saw to be causing the destruction, challenging the traditional view of animism as ‘primitive’ and simplistic compared to the ‘civilised’ world. Similarly, the categorisation of Amaringo’s work as *outsider art* can be complicated by resituating it in terms of *modernist* movements such as *surrealism* and *land art*. The works have more of an *avant-garde* lineage than we might expect, whilst they also share the vision of contemporary digital art such as *1 Heart 1 Tree*. In conclusion, although the *visions* may, on first viewing, delineate a harmonious rainforest, when considered alongside the ravaging of natural resources and ecosystems it becomes clear that they may have a far greater resonance within the global ecological crisis. Thus, the *visions* can be seen not an alien curiosity, but as a valid voice in the eco-political debate.

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ILLUSTRATIONS LIST


Fig. 4 Pablo Amaringo, *Yacu Caballo*, 2005. Pucallpa, Peru. Gouache on paper, 57 x 77 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 52)


Fig. 6 Detail of Pablo Amaringo, *Huarmi Taquina, Ícaro de Mujer*, 2005. Gouache on paper, 57 x 77 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 86)


Fig. 8 Unknown photographer, *Pablo (second from left), circa 1985, Stands With His Art Students, Displaying a Mural*. Photograph, c. 1985. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 6)

Fig. 9 Pablo Amaringo’s United Nations Environment Programme *Global 500* Roll of Honour Certificate. 1992, Brazil. (Source: Usko Ayar School)


Fig. 12 Detail of Pablo Amaringo, *Yacu Caballo*, 2005. Pucallpa, Peru. Gouache on paper, 57 x 77 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 52)


Fig. 16 Detail showing *ayahuasca* ceremony, Pablo Amaringo, *Las Nalpeas del Renaco*, 2002. Pucallpa, Peru. Gouache on paper, 54 x 61 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 112)


Fig. 18 Detail showing *Banisteriopsis Caapi* vines, Pablo Amaringo, *Genios del Renaco*, 2002. Pucallpa, Peru. Oil on canvas, 118 x 84 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Seti Gershberg, ‘A Hero’s Journey Thorugh the Visionary Eyes of the Shaman Artist Pablo Amaringo’, *The Path of the Sun*, 2014, <http://thepathofthesun.typepad.com/a/6a014e8a9ef749970d01a3fd1da3e6970b-pi> date accessed 29.01.2016)

Fig. 19 Pablo Amaringo, *Caspi Mutkiy*, 2005. Pucallpa, Peru. Gouache on paper, 57 x 77 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Howard G. Charing)


Fig. 21 Unknown artist, *Shipibo Pottery Olla*, late 20th century. Shipibo culture, Ucayali River basin. Painted clay, dimensions unknown. Collection of Howard C. Charing. (Image: Howard G. Charing)


Fig. 24 Detail showing snakes and river, Pablo Amaringo, *Yacu Caballo*, 2005. Pucallpa, Peru. Gouache on paper, 57 x 77 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 52)


Fig. 27 Detail of central sphere in *Chacruna Versicum, Canción de la Chacruna*, 2003. Gouache on paper, 51 x 64 cm. Usko Ayar School, Pucallpa, Peru. (Image: Charing and Cloudsley eds., *Ayahuasca Visions*, 2011, p. 89)

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1

Fig. 2
Fig. 5

Habitation du peintre Ginguin.
United Nations Environment Programme
Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement
Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente

This is to certify that

Pablo Amaringo

has been elected to the Global 500 Roll of Honour
of the United Nations Environment Programme in recognition
of outstanding practical achievements in the protection
and improvement of the environment

World Environment Day
5 June 1992
Fig. 22