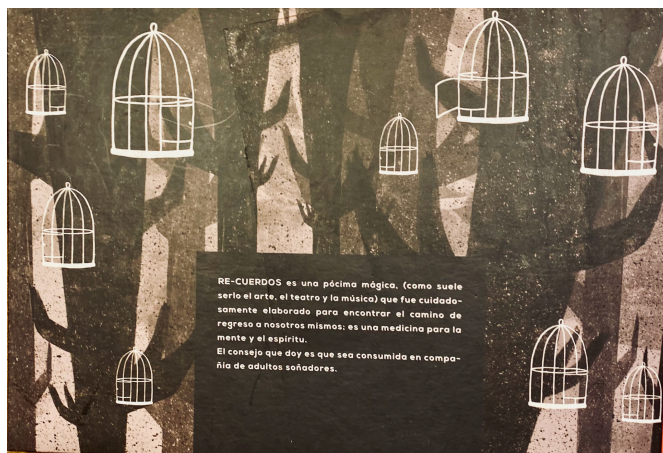


## PAT COOKE FUND

Proposal

Prepared by Yarima Ariza

### Art, tradition, food justice and environmental sustainability: Re-Cuerdos



*Re-Cuerdos*: Children's Book by Sergio Alejandro Rojas García "Re-Cuerdos is a magic potion (as it happens in the arts, theater, and music) that was carefully crafted to find the road back to ourselves; it is a medicine to heal the mind and the spirit, which I encourage to be consumed in company of adults who still dare to dream."

#### Introduction

The last few years at the Boston Arts Academy have served as an inspiration for my recent decision to restart my artistic production after a more than a 20 year hiatus. My re-connection with my artistic self is one that focuses on the craftsmanship of weaving and fiber arts that incorporates elements of social and environmental justice, a creative process that involves myself within a multi-generational community committed to the land and to creative and artistic freedom.

In 1997, I graduated with a BFA in Fiber Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and later pursued a masters in Interdisciplinary Arts with a concentration in book and paper arts. Ever since middle school, when I was introduced to weaving, I have been interested in all aspects of working with fibers, including the history and craftsmanship of weaving, and the artistic production that incorporates creating sculptures and installations using natural fibers.

Last year I had the opportunity to travel to a region in Colombia where my ancestors, the Yariguí tribe, lived for centuries. The Guane peoples, who were part of the Yariguíes were astute and savvy weavers who were known for their impressive cotton production. They developed highly sophisticated fabric designs without the need of dyes. They grew many varieties of cotton that were different in tone, and used such a natural palette to develop intricate geometric designs.



I traveled from Bogotá, passing through Tunja and Bucaramanga, covering approximately 1000 Km (600 miles) visiting museums and galleries, meeting with artists, and taking an ancestral hike through the Camino Real, a 6 km hike from Barichara to Guane. Towards the end of my road trip, I met a cousin in Velez who encouraged me to spend my last two days visiting a self-sustainable eco- farm in a remote area in a town called La Belleza.



### **Ama-Gi** [the “*return to the mother*” in ancient Sumerian]

I visited Ama-Gi, located in a remote area in Santander, Colombia. I traveled for over 3 hours (53 Km) through a rustic tertiary road from Puente Nacional, until I arrived at Ama-Gi in La Belleza, a small village that is part of La Provincia de Velez.

Ama-Gi is a family run, self-sustainable eco-farm where 5 brothers and sisters, and their parents built a community centered around social justice, the defense and sovereignty of the ancestral territory, and the wellbeing of all inhabitants of their ecosystem. Within Ama-Gi, the siblings have developed sustainable architecture, self-sustainable permaculture practices, promoted the biodiversity of the land through art (murals), music, children books and other small publications. But, most notably, I was quite intrigued by their commitment to care for, store, and propagate native seeds. After spending less than 24 hours at Ama-Gi, I left inspired to return to learn more about the Rojas García family, and the impressive work they have done in the last 12 years fighting for environmental justice, the protection of native seeds, food sovereignty and ways in which the arts can be a catalyst for change in the fight for social justice and sustainability.



### **The Project:**

While visiting AMA-Gi, one of the brothers, Sergio Alejandro Rojas Garcia, mentioned the need for support in two areas: 1) supporting the work that his sister has been doing by painting murals in the surrounding public schools where the arts are almost non-existent. As part of this work, there is a need to help document the 304 species of birds found in the region, since native bird species are the main subjects of the murals she has been working on with local communities. Additionally, she has been working on a line of clothing and other Ama-Gi merchandise featuring native fauna and flora that she hopes to develop and promote as part of a marketing campaign she has in mind ; 2) supporting their urgent need to translate many of their small publications into English, as well as in helping develop their website and their presence in a variety of social media platforms..

Concurrently, while supporting Ama-Gi with the two aforementioned endeavors, my hope is to learn more about their work around food justice and seed sovereignty. In particular, I am interested in three of their initiatives: the **native seed libraries** they have created in 12 public schools in the area to promote the learning and care of native seeds amongst younger generations; the **Red de Guardianes de Semillas** [Seed Guardians Network] through the celebration of *mingas* (cooperative work in a community to achieve a common goal) at the farm of one of the seed guardians; and their monthly **Banquete Campesino** (Farmer's Feast), a monthly gathering where the host farmer cooks using the native seeds they have been caring for, in addition to sharing the recipe as part of a recipe book compilation.

This is a trip with four main goals: to learn more about the Ama-Gi community; to reconnect with the land of my ancestors; to fuel my artistic practice; and to share this enduring learning experience with members of the BAA community through collaboration with members of the Rojas García family. I know there has been an interest to add a Fiber Studies elective in the Visual and Design Department, and I would be honored to share my knowledge and experience with students about my creative process and the history of Fiber Art (Fiber Studies) and the beautiful ancestral traditions from Colombia and other non-Eurocentric ancestral lands, and/or to share my experience living in a self-sustainable eco-farm in rural Colombia to support student understanding of the importance of native seeds, permaculture practices, environmental justice and the role of the artist within the larger community.

By spending two weeks in Ama-Gi, learning from the Rojas-García practices and supporting them in areas of immediate need, I also hope to develop a cross-continental and multicultural collaboration with teachers and students at BAA to work on art, world language and science related projects involving native fauna and flora from the La Belleza region and its surroundings. I foresee cross-cultural collaborations made possible through virtual meetings where students can connect directly with members of the Ama-Gi community, and learn from their wealth of knowledge and experience. I plan on spending as much time learning about the native seeds, and I hope to support their project by returning to my roots as a visual artist to help, among other things, document the seeds, photograph native birds, organize their recipe book archive and help with book and graphic design, and support any efforts in the beautification of their sustainable buildings and other structures. I also would like to support their web page and social media development and help translate many of their research work into English.

### The Plan and Timeline:

- **May-June, 2024:** I will meet with the Graphic Design teacher (Gretta Olton); Visual Arts teachers (Rimi Mallick and Kathleen Marsh), the Business teacher (Samuel Mendoza), the Spanish teacher (Emily Melo), and the Biology teacher (Jean Binjour) to discuss ways to collaborate and support Ama-Gi's vision and mission through their curriculum during the SY24-25. Ideas include:
  - Students in Graphic Design develop Ama-Gi's website accessible in multiple languages.
  - Students develop a business and marketing plan for Ama-Gi to promote their products.
  - Students create a marketing strategy through the creation of Ama-Gi's social media presence.
  - Students design a mural based on photographs of native bird species from La Belleza, Santander.
  - Coordinate a virtual author visit with Sergio Alejandro Rojas García to discuss his book, *Re-Cuerdos*, with students in Spanish 4/5 (Native Speakers).
  - Coordinate a virtual artist visit with Lenni Rojas García, one of the sisters who is an artist and has painted murals in various rural schools in the area involving members of the community.
  - Coordinate a virtual meeting with one or more of the Rojas García family members to discuss the process of caring for, store, and propagate native seeds, its environmental impacts, and ways in which genetically modified fruits and vegetables differ from those being preserved at Ama-Gi.
- **Mid June, 2024**  
At least 3 multi-disciplinary projects are confirmed with BAA teachers
- **End of June:**
  - I communicate with members of the Rojas García family to plan for my trip and to discuss details of the projects to be completed with the support and/or in collaboration with students and teachers at BAA.
  - Identify technical and other infrastructure needs to ensure project completion.
- **Beginning through mid July**
  - I purchase any materials or supplies needed for my trip, including any equipment required to support my project while at Ama-Gi
- **July 12-26, 2024**
  - I travel and stay at Ama-Gi
- **End-of-August**
  - I contact the BAA teachers involved in my project to meet and plan their interdisciplinary project
  - During our end-of-August or beginning of September PD I meet with the teachers to support with any curricular planning involving the collaboration with Ama-Gi and finalize a timeline for completion.
- **End of September or Early October**
  - I present my project during a whole staff meeting, including the multi-disciplinary projects completed in collaboration with BAA teachers and students. Members of the Rojas Garcia family to join remotely.
- **October-November, 2024**
  - Completed projects are shared with the Rojas Garcia family

### PROJECTED BUDGET

Item	Price
Airline Ticket [Avianca]	\$950.00
Lodging	\$900.00
Meals	\$250.00
Equipment and Supplies to use/consume at Ama-Gi	\$500.00
Ground transportation, including gas and tolls	\$250.00
Materials and supplies for project completion at BAA	\$300.00
Purchase of 12 <i>Re-Cuerdos</i> signed books for Spanish class library (@\$35/ea)	\$420.00
Other miscellaneous expenses	\$100.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,670.00</b>