Olinda Silvano Inuma de Arias  
Peru | Textiles for Home

Embracing the natural and spiritual world into design

Kené is an ancient art representing nature and the living culture of the Shipibo-Konibo people of the Amazon basin. “Kené means ‘designs’ and is the name for the geometric patterns that identify my ethnicity,” explains artist Olinda Silvano Inuma de Arias. “Kené…also summarizes the worldview, knowledge, and aesthetics of an entire people, their tradition and roots in time. It is a source of information about our origins and the close links between our community and our lands.”

Kené are inspired by the intake of plants, such as Ayahuasca and Piri Piri, which Amazonian tribes have used for centuries for spiritual and religious purposes. “They guide us to tell us how we should represent the images we see,” says Olinda. Her textile products are made with 100% cotton fabric that she dyes with natural plant pigments including caoba bark, mango peel, guayaba bark, avocado beans, and almonds—all of which she gathers in the forest. Once the dye is set, Olinda uses “magic mud” collected from a river for the black color in her designs, which are drawn freehand. “Finally, if I want to add embroidery, I buy the thread in stores to do it.” Jewelry is made with beads and seeds from Silvano’s home city of Pucalpa. “I create these pieces myself along with my mother, sisters, and three daughters…each of us has her own designs.”

“My mission is to make visible the role of the migrant indigenous woman and to move forward regardless of the unforeseen event…I have never given up and I am the symbol of struggle and living culture of Shipibo-Konibo. My sisters in my community and I work at home doing this because it has become a source of independence.” Olinda’s work has been displayed at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Canada, and ARCOMadrid 2019, in Madrid, Spain.