

Islands of time

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Artist to Accompany Explorer into Venezuela's Remote Chimanta Massif *Daily Radio Broadcasts to be Dispatched During Two-Week Expedition*

New York, NY — April 15, 2009. Photographer Mathias Kessler announced his plans to accompany explorer Charles Brewer-Carias on an expedition to the Venezuelan outback. The two-week expedition begins May 3rd, when the team will depart the village Chivatón by helicopter for the remote Roraima Plateau, located in southeastern Venezuela. The area is unique for its tepuis, the mysterious table-like mountains that rise up like land-locked islands from the ground, but the team's primary interest lies underground, in the sandstone caves of this region. Part of one of the world's largest quartzite cave systems, these caves remained largely unexplored.

The expedition team is an unusual hybrid of a seasoned explorer, the artist, and several teams of scientists from Venezuela, the Czech Republic, and the United States. While the scientists will be seeking more traditional specimens of cave life forms (phototropic biospeleothems), expedition leader Brewer-Carias has said he's in "the game of exploration." Kessler, meanwhile, is pursuing the idea of exploration itself—asking the vexing question of what kind of "explorer" is possible in a 21st century global culture. What is at stake for an explorer who's driven to "find" and map the last unmapped places, but who's also adamant that these places not succumb to commercial and tourism development? What does exploration today mean for our ever-evolving relationship to nature?

Kessler asserts that the focus of his project will be on expedition leader Brewer-Carias, a former dentist who's earned a reputation for being as rare a breed as some of the species he tracks. Seen by some as one of the world's last 19th century-style explorers, Brewer-Carias has completed hundreds of expeditions into Venezuela's backcountry and is an expert on the Guyana Highlands. Not immune to controversy, Brewer-Carias provides a particularly provocative subject, given Kessler's interest in profiling contemporary exploration against the backdrop of centuries past, when explorers were typically private individuals from the European upper class.

In addition to shooting still photographs of the cave and tepui terrain, Kessler will be invoking that older form of wireless communication, radio, making daily broadcasts (via satellite phone) from the Chimanta Massif. Collaborating with a radio producer in New York, Kessler's team will upload raw tape from the expedition that will feature soundscapes of the environment, interviews with the scientists, and sound specimens of a more ephemeral nature—silences specific to the caves, for instance. These broadcasts, he suggests, are a way to historically reference and, more importantly, to reinvent the sound-collecting that accompanied exploration and natural science exhibitions of the past.

With this expedition to Venezuela, Kessler takes a more radical, literal journey with hopes of extending his artistic focus of the past several years: his examination of our relationship to nature in the 21st century.



AREA OF INTEREST



