



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

Felix V. DiGiovanni collection from Colombia

Rachel Menyuk

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | National Museum of the American Indian |
| Title: | Felix V. DiGiovanni collection from Colombia |
| Date: | 1935-1941 |
| Identifier: | NMAI.AC.300 |
| Creator: | DiGiovanni, Felix V. Beer, Paul |
| Extent: | 2 Film reels (16mm) 100 Photographic prints (13.5 x 10.5) 0.1 Linear feet 7 Videocassettes (VHS) 3 Videocassettes (U-matic) |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | This collection includes the original documentary film "Guahiboland: Indian Life in the Orinoco Plains of Colombia," produced and directed by Felix V. DiGiovanni in 1941. Also included are 100 photographic prints, shot by DiGiovanni and his cameraman Paul Beer, that document the daily life of Guahibo community members in the Vichada and Orinoco regions of Colombia between 1935-1941. Other indigenous communities photographed include the Piapoco (Piapoko), Baniwa, and Tukano (Tucano). |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Felix V. and Pauline G. DiGiovanni, 1992.

Separated Materials

A collection of Guahibo ethnographic materials were also donated to the National Museum of the American Indian object collections with catalog numbers 25/4002-25/4047. See the [Smithsonian Collections Search Center](#) .

Related Materials

The National Anthropological Archives (NAA) holds a collection of Felix DiGiovanni and Paul Beer photographs of the Guahibo and other indigenous tribes of eastern Colombia, Photo lot 1995-41. <https://sova.si.edu/record/NAA.PhotoLot.1995-41>

Processing Information

Processed by Rachel Menyuk, Processing Archivist, 2023.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Felix V. DiGiovanni collection from Colombia, image #, NMAI.AC.300, National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Access to NMAI Archives Center collections is by appointment only, Monday - Friday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment (phone: 301-238-1400, email: nmaiarchives@si.edu).

Conditions Governing Use

Rights restrictions apply. Contact the NMAI Archives center (nmaiphotos@si.edu) for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Felix V. DiGiovanni (ca. 1913-1990) was an American engineer, writer, photographer, and filmmaker. He was raised in the Bronx and graduated with an engineering degree from The City College of New York in 1933. As a young man, he traveled throughout Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil, and later became interested in documenting the eastern plains of Colombia, known as Los Llanos, as well as its inhabitants. In the late 1930s, he returned to Colombia to film a documentary on the indigenous people of the Vaupés region. DiGiovanni's partner in the expedition was Paul Beer. Beer (1904-1979) was a German photographer active in Bogota, Colombia, in the late 1920s. By 1941, DiGiovanni's documentary film about the Guahibo, "Guahiboland" was completed. In 1944 he returned to Colombia to work with the U.S. Cinchona Mission, which comprised a team of scientists travelling to the Andes region to find cinchona trees, whose bark produces the alkaloid quinine, used for treating malaria. DiGiovanni met Tom Bellis during this time. Bellis (1907-1993) was an officer with the Food and Drug Administration. From October 1942 until December 1945, he worked for the Board of Economic Warfare in Bogota, Colombia at the Instituto Nacional de Higiene Samper-Martinez. Here, he directed a laboratory which analyzed cinchona bark. In November 1945, Bellis purchased this set of photographs, along with 28 Guahibo artifacts, from DiGiovanni. Felix DiGiovanni returned to New York in 1946 and became a mechanical engineer with a major oil company. In 1960, he completed a draft of a manuscript about his experiences with the Guahibo, titled *The Call of the Curassow and the Land of the Guahibo Indians*. He intended to publish it and also produce a Spanish translation, but he died December 31, 1990, before it could be finished. In 1994, Pauline DiGiovanni, DiGiovanni's widow, published 40 copies of the manuscript in English. After the expedition with DiGiovanni, Paul Beer's photography focused primarily on architectural and industrial themes. He lived in Bogota until his death in 1979.

Biographical note from: <https://sova.si.edu/record/NAA.PhotoLot.1995-41>

Scope and Contents

Series 1: "Guahiboland: Indian Life in the Orinoco Plains of Colombia" film, 1941, includes the original 16mm film produced and directed by Felix V. DiGiovanni. Paul Beer served as the cameraman. The original film (approximately 1200 feet) came in two parts, a metal can with black and white film and a small, metal can with Kodachrome film. The NMAI film and video center made several viewing copies on VHS tapes. There are also three video recordings on U-Matic tapes which include the original black and white, original color, a first generation copy and a second generation copy.

Series 2: Photographs from the Colombian Plains, 1935-1941, includes 100 mounted black and white photographic prints (13 ½ x 10 ½) made by Felix DiGiovanni and Paul Beer. The majority of the photographs

were shot during the making of DiGiovanni's documentary film and highlight the daily life and activities of Guahibo community members in the Orinoco and Vichada regions of Colombia. A smaller amount of photographs include other indigenous communities in the region including the Piapoco (Piapoko), Baniwa, and Tukano (Tucano). The captions and descriptions of the photographs were provided by the DiGiovanni family in 1992.

Catalog numbers: P25101-P25200.

Series 3: The Call of the Curassow and the Land of the Guahibo Indians, includes a copy of the manuscript written by Felix V.D. Giovanni and published posthumously by his wife Pauline in 1994. This was formerly in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation records in Box 422, Folder 13.

Arrangement

Arranged into series by format, the photographs are arranged by catalog number.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Baniwa
- Guahibo
- Piapoco (Piapoko)
- Tukano (Tucano)

Cultures:

- Baniwa
- Guahibo
- Piapoco (Piapoko)
- Tukano (Tucano)

Types of Materials:

- Documentary films
- Photographic prints

Places:

- Orinoco River Region (Venezuela and Colombia)