- **Where:** Pasto, Nariño
- **Region:** Pacífic
- **Materials:** wood and resin

The Pasto varnish is a decorative technique developed by one of the Indian communities in the department of Nariño, in southern Colombia. It is one of the few remaining handicraft techniques of Indian origin and it has been carefully preserved since it became known by Spanish conquerors, who were charmed by the work done by the Indians. During his 1756 to 1767 trip, Chronicler Fray de Santa Gertrudis described it thus in his book *Maravillas de la naturaleza* (Wonders of Nature).

The artisan tradition of the Pasto varnish has pre-Hispanic origins and a long history that has developed in the course of colonial, republican and modern times.

The mopa-mopa resin

The basis of the varnish is a resin obtained from the mopa-mopa, a bush that grows in the department of Putumayo, part of which is located in the Amazon rainforest. Twice a year the plant gives out a jelly-like paste that is converted into a fine, thin sheet (similar to a fabric) by means of an artisan heating process.

The Pasto varnish technique

The mopa-mopa resin sheets are colored with vegetable dyes and then applied to the surface of wooden objects forming beautiful shapes that embellish plates, dishes, pitchers, boxes, spoons, ash trays, salt shakers, pencil holders, chairs, chests, tables, benches, etc.

The Indians of Pasto (…) varnish the wooden crockery with such neatness that they imitate live the crockery from China.

The varnish's versatility allows it to be used in canvas paintings, glass, metal plates, mud, wood and on flat or textured surfaces

The technique demands great ability in drawing and cutting the shapes, as well as in applying the colored pieces and combining various colors and shapes to give the designs the desired consistency and tone.

Ornamental motifs

The original Pasto varnish technique has not changed in the course of time, but the ornamental motifs change to adapt to the tastes and fashion of present times.

One of main decorative motifs of this kind of handicrafts is the narrations of stories and events in the life of the peasants in cold regions: fruit sellers, women with children in their arms, landscapes, small houses, roads, and also the world of magic and religion: frogs that announce the rain, owls, fire butterflies and angels with Indian features.

If you like The Pasto varnish, you may be interested in:

- Other handicrafts: Autochthonous materials.
- Culture: Carnival of Blacks and Whites in Pasto .
- Places: Purace Natural Park