



WIPO MAGAZINE

Arts and Crafts of Colombia

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Close to one million people in Colombia earn a living directly or indirectly from the country's vibrant arts and crafts sector. A significant contributor to the national economy, the sector counts some 350,000 artisans, approximately 60 percent of whom are from rural and indigenous areas, and 65 percent of whom are women. The richness and diversity of the country's arts and crafts was on display at a unique exhibition at WIPO headquarters from September 25 to October 12, which was organized jointly by WIPO and the Colombian Government.

The exhibits were drawn from the collection of *Artesanías de Colombia*, a government institution responsible for the promotion and development of the country's artisanal and craft sector. The Colombian government encourages artisans to use the intellectual property system as a means of protecting their creative works and obtaining just remuneration for their efforts, while also preserving the country's national patrimony for future generations.

Opening the exhibition, Ambassador Clemencia Forero Ucros, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations in Geneva, described Colombian crafts as the ultimate representation of the country's culture, idiosyncrasy and folklore. She stressed the importance for a country like Colombia of "working hand-in-hand with WIPO for the protection of our cultural expressions."

The exhibition featured jewelry, silverware, basketry, tapestry, ceramics, wood masks and finely woven objects, produced in different regions and by a cross section of indigenous groups. Space permits us here to touch on only three of these traditional art forms.

Heritage of the Zenú

The *Vueltiao* hat, one of the best known and popular symbols of Colombia, is the Colombian craft *par excellence*. The hats are the work of the Zenú ethnic group, who use traditional colors, designs and weaving techniques that date back over a thousand years. The Zenú use a complex traditional method to transform the natural *caña flecha* palm tree fiber into black and white fibers that they then weave into patterns representing the totemic elements of the Zenú culture. These carry traditional names, such as Heart of the Fan, Crocodile Flower, etc. The Zenú use their traditional techniques today to create a range of products for the home.



The *Caña Flecha* Hat, designed by Olga Piedrahita, shown here at the *Identidad Colombia* (Colombia Identity) fashion show. (Photo *Artesanías de Colombia*)



A Wayúu design on a traditionally woven

Weaving of the Waleker

The women of the Wayúu ethnic group, from the Guajira Peninsula on the Colombia-Venezuela border, claim that they learned their weaving skills from *Waleker* – the spider. The secrets of their traditional weaving are part of the initiation rites of adolescent girls to womanhood. The intricate hand-stitched *kanás* (weaving designs) are an ancient Wayúu art form and represent the elements found in the matriarchal structure of their society, environment and daily life.

hammock. (Photo: WIPO/Mercedes Martínez Dozal)

Pasto Glazing – the resin of the Mopa-mopa

The indigenous people of the Nariño Department of Colombia, developed a technique for extracting the resin of the *mopa-mopa* tree, which they cook and color with vegetable dyes to produce laminae. These they apply to the surface of wooden items, creating striking designs. The thousand-year old technique, known as Pasto Glazing, is unchanged today, and is now used to create contemporary designs on trays and plates, vases, boxes, and other objects. The technique requires a delicate touch as the colored fragments must be placed precisely on the wood surface to create the textures and tones of the designs.



Pasto Glazing (Photo *Artesanías de Colombia*)



Horse and Rider by Eduardo Sandoval (Photo *Artesanías de Colombia*)

The pottery of La Chamba

Horse and Rider, a black pottery piece by Eduardo Sandoval, was made using the traditional techniques of the people of La Chamba, which he learnt from his grandfather. La Chamba potters create black or red ceramic pieces, which they polish by friction with agate and river stones. Mr. Sandoval learnt the techniques as a lad, then went on to study fine arts, painting and sculpture. He has La Chamba clay delivered regularly to his Bogota studio and melds the techniques of his youth with that of his academic training to create unique works, which have won local recognition.

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