

## Huichol Art and Culture: Balancing the World

**Santa Fe, NM (August 21, 2009)**—For the first time, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology presents a significant collection of Huichol art from the early part of the last century in *Huichol Art and Culture: Balancing the World*. The exhibition opens at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture April 11, 2010 and will run through March 6, 2011.

There are important ties between Huichol work and Native American, prehispanic, and Hispanic art histories and cultures. Known today for colorful, decorative yarn paintings, the origins of modern Huichol art are found in the earlier Huichol religious arts of the Robert M. Zingg ethnographic collection at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture.

*Huichol Art and Culture: Balancing the World* focuses on the Huichol, a Native American people of western Mexico who for many centuries have retained their unique culture and prehispanic religious beliefs. Their remote location in the rugged Sierra Madre Occidental mountains primarily in the states of Jalisco and Nayarit has allowed for greater resistance than any other indigenous group to the forces of Christianization and acculturation. The Huichol people today continue to create traditional art and practice ancient rituals that predate the time of Spanish contact.

From 1934-1935, Dr. Robert Mowry Zingg (1900-1957) was the first American anthropologist to conduct extended ethnographic fieldwork among the Huichol in the community of Tuxpan de Bolaños. Zingg lived with Huichol families and participated in everyday life, while studying their mythology and ceremonialism. *Huichol Art and Culture: Balancing the World* presents the collection of Huichol artifacts which Zingg collected on behalf of the Laboratory of Anthropology during the earliest years of its history as an institution.

In the past and today, Huichol art is made to communicate with a pantheon of ancestors and gods. When Zingg arrived in Tuxpan, he found that most Huichol adults were occupied with making art. As he observed, the Huichol constantly create offerings which serve as visual prayers to the gods. As part of the ceremonial cycle, the Huichol make pilgrimages to leave offerings at sacred sites.

Ceremonial offerings to the gods are the precursors to the art of modern Huichol yarn painting. Early Huichol votive art evolved into art produced for sale beginning in the 1950s, when artists adapted traditional techniques, designs, and materials to “paint” in yarn. Sophisticated and vibrant Huichol yarn paintings have now become renowned in the global art market.

Among the highlights of the Zingg collection are outstanding examples of ancient, symbolic textile designs that were intricately woven on backstrap looms by Huichol women. The collection features prayer arrows, richly decorated votive gourd bowls, and other offerings for the gods. Oversized shamans’ chairs and diminutive gods’ chairs are unique to Huichol ceremonies. Colorful macaw feathers, beaded jewelry, deerskin quivers, embroidered clothing, and hats adorned with feathers, squirrel tails, and ribbons all attest to a time and a culture where art objects were made for everyday and ceremonial use, not tourist consumption.

The concept of balance is central to Huichol art and culture. The balancing of opposites, such as the wet and dry seasons, or darkness and light, is a prevalent theme in Huichol art. Huichol ceremonies are performed and offerings are made to keep the world in balance, ensuring successful crops and hunting, fertility, and health. Today, the Huichol say that they continue to make art and perform the centuries-old rituals not just for their own people, but for the benefit of everyone in the world.

The concept of balancing opposites, so central to Huichol culture, is also basic to the Pueblo worldview and is seen in Pueblo architecture, government, and ceremony. A further connection to Pueblo culture can be found in the Uto-Aztecan language of the Huichol. It is related to the language of the ancient Aztecs of central Mexico, to the Cora, to the Tohono O'odham and Hopi of Arizona, and to the Tanoan languages of the Northern Rio Grande region of New Mexico.

Zingg, who spent his youth in northern New Mexico, noted a similarity in "the richness of the ceremonial life of both the Huichols and the Pueblos." He and other scholars have drawn parallels between the two cultures, including the importance of the cardinal directions and elaborate religious symbolism in art and decoration involving the deer, fire, rain, corn, and concepts of growth and fertility.

## **Media Contacts**

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Exhibition images may be found on the media center; <http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/>

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Located on Museum Hill™, the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture shares the beautiful Milner Plaza with the Museum of International Folk Art. Here, Now and Always, a major permanent exhibition at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, combines the voices of living Native Americans with ancient and contemporary artifacts and interactive multimedia to tell the complex stories of the Southwest. The Buchsbaum Gallery displays ceramics from the region's pueblos. Five changing galleries present exhibits on subjects ranging from archaeological

excavations to contemporary art. In addition, an outdoor sculpture garden offers rotating exhibits of works by Native American sculptors.

The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

#### Information for the Public

**Location:** The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture is located on Museum Hill™, Camino Lejo off Old Santa Fe Trail.

Information: 505-476-1250 or visit [www.indianartsandculture.org](http://www.indianartsandculture.org)

**Days/Times:** Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day the Museum is also open on Monday.

#### **Admission:**

**Sundays:** New Mexico residents with ID are admitted FREE.

Students with ID receive a one-dollar discount.

**Wednesdays:** New Mexico resident seniors (60+) with ID are free.

Adult single-museum admission is \$6 for New Mexico residents, \$9 for nonresidents; OR \$15 one-day, two museums of your choice (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Museum of International Folk Art, New Mexico Museum of Art, and Palace of the Governors/New Mexico History Museum) OR \$20 four-day pass to five museums (includes all 4 listed above and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art) **Youth 16 and under, New Mexico Veterans with 50% or more disability, and Foundation Members always free.**

**Field Trips:** There is no charge for educational groups attending the museum with their instructor and/or adult chaperones. Contact the Tours office by phone at (505) 476-1140 or (505) 476-1211 to arrange class/group visits to the Museum.

Direct flights between Santa Fe and Dallas/Fort Worth are now available on American Eagle.