



EMORY

MICHAEL C.  
CARLOS  
MUSEUM

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**Grandfather Sun, Grandmother Moon: Wixarika Arts of Modern West Mexico  
Through December 31, 2014**

The Carlos Museum's Native North American gallery now hosts an exhibition representing the Wixarika (*wee-shab-REE-kab*)--often known as the Huichol--indigenous people of modern western Mexico. Their stunning beaded objects and pressed-yarn "paintings" span the sacred to the secular, from prayer bowls used on their pilgrimage ceremonies to masks made expressly for collectors. Brightly colored, precise, dynamic, and detailed, these works depict their sacred sacrament, the peyote cactus, the deer, the sun and the moon, shamans, maize plants, jaguars, and scorpions.

The Wixarika people live in the Sierra Madre mountains of western Mexico, where the modern states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Durango meet. Their cultural roots reach back several thousand years and they have resisted acculturation despite strong colonial, national, and now global pressures that have threatened their traditions. Making and selling their art, bead- and yarn-work especially, has helped the Wixarika maintain their ways and accommodate change, functioning in the world economy. They sell versions of their sacred objects to collectors and tourists as a way to avoid having to move to the cities and risk losing their cohesive beliefs and practices. This exhibition highlights their beliefs as seen through their ritual and secular arts, created as they negotiate the modern era in all its complexity.

Above all, the Wixarika strive toward balance in themselves, between humans and nature, and in the spirit world. Their ritual life is oriented toward maintaining harmony. All phenomena are considered interrelated-- particularly humans, maize, deer, and peyote-- and interchange forms. For instance, in mythic times deer became the peyote cactus, which now is "hunted" on the annual pilgrimage to the northern deserts. Shamans (*maru'akame*) mediate the natural balancing of the cosmic realms and the transformations that occur in other realities. Art is used in rituals, its bright colors meant to attract the attention of the spirits that are believed to control all natural phenomena including rains, the crops, time, and the sun and moon. Made by both men and women artists, prayer bowls carry offerings and requests to the invisible powers, while yarn paintings tell the stories, dreams, and visions that also relate to the Other Side. In recent times, decorated masks --once used for spiritual purposes-- have become items for sale to outsiders; although the traditional symbols may remain, their function has shifted toward economic ends.

This exhibition comes to us through the generosity of three friends of the Museum: Mike McQuaide, a professor at Oxford College, Stephen and Claudia Kramer, lenders of Colombian art and supporters of Museum's educational mission, and Stephanie Jolluck, a local exporter of indigenous arts from Guatemala. Photographs of Wixarika artists making the same kinds of pieces on display accompany the works of art.

**About the Michael C. Carlos Museum**

The Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University collects, preserves, exhibits, and interprets art and artifacts from antiquity to the present in order to provide unique opportunities for education and enrichment in the community, and to promote interdisciplinary teaching and research at Emory University. The Carlos Museum is one of the Southeast's premier museums with collections of art from Greece, Rome, Egypt, Near East, Nubia, the Americas, Africa, and Asia, as well as a collection of works on paper from the Renaissance to the present. For location and admission information, visit [carlos.emory.edu/visit/hours-admission](http://carlos.emory.edu/visit/hours-admission).

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