

Rosa Elodia Canelos Vargas | Kuyan
warmi tejedoras del barro | Ecuador
| Ceramics

Traditional pottery from Ecuador's Kichwa Canelos Pueblo



Nestled in the dense Amazonian jungles of Ecuador, the traditional ceramics of the Kichwa Canelos Pueblo peoples remain mostly unchanged for centuries. And yet they are also continually evolving, thanks to the efforts of individual artists like Rosa Canelos Vargas. Showcasing ornamental and ritual designs on functional forms, Rosa's work serves both utilitarian and decorative purposes, infused by both ancient and ever-changing histories.

Using techniques and materials that are obtained from her immediate surroundings, Vargas builds on a creative history she learned from generations of artisans before her. She didn't have to look too far for artistic mentors: Rosa's birthplace is an active ceramic community with ancient roots. The extraction of clay, for instance, has happened here for centuries, gathered largely from old mines close to the town. Pigments, along with necessary materials like resin, are also harvested from regional sources.

Mainly, decorations comprise painted geometrical motifs, realistic animals, or mythological characters. The intriguing patterns are made perhaps even more appealing by the materials used to accomplish it: paint brushes are handmade, using locks of the artist's hair as bristles. This naturally thick, straight hair yields itself beautifully to a wide range of shapes and unexpectedly delicate effects. According to archaeological records, this method has origins in pre-Columbian, Tupi Amazonian tribal artisans. Thanks to the efforts of master artists like Vargas, the transmission of this singularly historical artistic practice has once again thrived within diverse communities of both present and future art-makers.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST