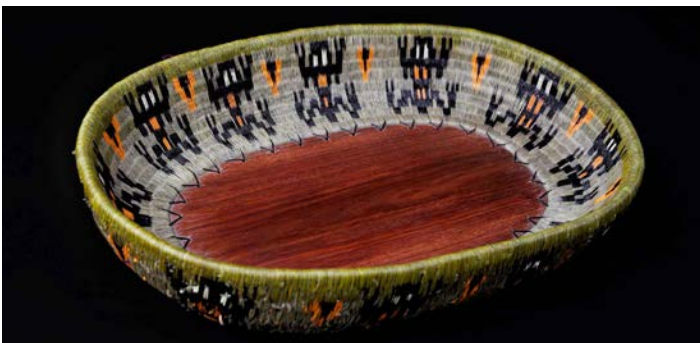




Crucelina Chocho Opua |
Colombia | Basketry

Werregue palm baskets from the Wounaan people of Colombia



Colombian basketry artist Crucelina Chocho Opua is member of the Wounaan indigenous group, which is native to parts of Central and South America. An expert in werregue weaving, she lives with her father in the town of El Litoral de San Juan, along the Pacific Coast. As a little girl she watched her mother and grandmother weaving baskets that they later used for daily tasks; at eight, under the watchful eye of her family members, she began weaving her own items.

Opua strongly believes in the importance of preserving the techniques and artwork of her ancestors. Each of these intricately woven baskets contains geometric patterning and motifs unique to the Wounaan people for thousands of years. Due to their meticulous construction and inherent complexity, Opua's larger baskets can take several months to make.

The extraction of the fibers needed to compose these baskets comes from wild werregue gathered from

nearby forests; though this is an activity traditionally done by men, the processes of fiber preparation and weaving are done exclusively by the Wounaan women. Werregue fibers are washed, packed in bunches of 20 and dried in the sun to completely decolorize them. The fiber is then ready to be put through the process of dyeing and spiraling. In their home gardens, women sow vegetable dyes like "achiote" and "puchama" which are used to obtain colors such as yellow, orange and black (obtained by burying the fiber in the river's mud for 48 hours) which then are combined with the natural "beige" of the fiber to create colorful designs. Baskets of different shapes are woven with a spiral technique, which uses a central cord as the "soul" or "gut" and around this, the thinner colored fibers are woven with the help of a long needle. Opua's method of basket-making produces vessels of both striking coloration and dazzling designs, transforming the utilitarian nature of a basket into an item sure to be treasured for generations.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ARTIST