



Leonidas Gutiérrez | Colombia |
Textiles for Home

Handwoven traditions from the Amazon



The jigra is an important item for the Koreguaje people of Colombia's Amazon rainforest. Leonidas Gutiérrez and Artesanías Koreguaje Pairepa—an informal group of community members—create these bags, made with cumare—a type of palm, according to standards passed down through generations. Once used mainly for the collection of yucca, corn, plantain, and as a fishing tool, jigras are now mainly used to carry personal items. "Each design has a special meaning reflecting the feelings, thoughts, and traditions of the Koreguaje people," says Leonidas. "The weaving craftsmanship has become very important not only for the commercial part (since it helps to improve their quality of life), but also because the usage of their products contributes to the preservation of their cultural traditions."

The Cumare palm grows in Caquetá region of Colombia. Every three months the buds (young leaves of the plant) are harvested and their fibers used for crafts including jigras, hammocks, fishing nets, and

baskets. Each member of the community has an important role in the creation of jigras, from collecting and boiling the buds to prepare the palm strands, to weaving and dyeing the bags. The weaving process can last between two to four days and is done entirely by hand with a paddle to guide the weaver in terms of size.

After working in Bogotá, Leonidas made the decision to return to his village and begin organizing within his community to rescue its traditional crafts. "I wanted to become a bridge between my community and the market so the culture and the traditions of the Koreguaje people, represented in their crafts, are known around the world," he says. Through the sharing of these crafts Leonidas is proud of "helping to unite 20 communities of the Koreguaje people where dreams, hopes, and illusions are woven."

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST