Yarn Paintings

The rugged mountains and remote villages of the Sierra de Nayarit north of Guadalajara are the homeland of roughly ten to fourteen thousand Huichol Indians. These were among the last tribes to come under Spanish rule, and their religion still is essentially pagan, revolving around several important agricultural deities. Deer is the most sacred of all animals, its blood a symbol of fertility. Corn is the source of all life, for it was Nacahue, mother of all gods, who gave corn to the first man for planting, and from it was born the first Huichol woman. Peyote is a means of communication with the gods, and the consumption of peyote by the Huichol people is a deeply religious experience. The unity of these three elements — deer, corn, and peyote — is the absolute core of Huichol beliefs.

The Huichols express these feelings through their art, which is made not from the standpoint of decoration, but to give profound expression to deep spiritual beliefs. This makes traditional Huichol art, whether it be meticulous beadwork, yarn paintings, wooden masks, or striking embroidered and woven personal adornments, beautiful not only from its aesthetic standpoint but from the psychological as well.

Huichol art broadly groups the most traditional and most recent innovations in the folk art and handcrafts produced by the Huichol people, who live in the states of Jalisco, Durango, Zacatecas and Nayarit in Mexico. The unifying factor of the work is the colorful decoration using symbols and designs which date back centuries. The most common and commercially successful products are "yarn paintings" and objects decorated with small commercially produced beads. Yarn paintings consist of commercial yarn pressed into boards coated with wax and resin and are derived from a ceremonial tablet called a neirika. The Huichol have a long history of beading, making the beads from clay, shells, corals, seeds and more and using them to make jewelry and to decorate bowls and other items. The "modern" beadwork usually consists of masks and wood sculptures covered in small, brightly colored commercial beads fastened with wax and resin.