

# Mythic Visions

## YARN PAINTINGS OF A HUICHOL SHAMAN

A new exhibit at the Museum can come about in one of many ways. In the case of our new exhibit "Mythic Visions: Yarn Paintings of a Huichol Shaman," it was inspired by the Museum's recent acquisition of a unique collection of the work of one Huichol shaman artist, José Benítez Sánchez.

The Huichol Indians of northwestern Mexico originated the art of yarn painting in the 1950s, transferring the rich motifs of their spiritual art from their ceramics and embroideries to a two-dimensional art form. José Benítez Sánchez is considered the finest exponent of this art form, executing the work as a unique form of textile art, achieved by the use of brilliantly colored strands of yarn. These strands are applied to boards thinly coated with beeswax, to form the vivid and complex images of the Huichol art.

The "paintings" emerge from otherworldly visions experienced by the shaman during the ritual consumption of sacred peyote. The collection of peyote requires an annual 300-mile pilgrimage to a desert in San Luis Potosi, known to the Huichol as the Wirikuta, sacred home to their ancestors. The art, which has become known throughout the world in the last few years, is a kind of artistic code, encapsulating the rich religious tradition of the Huichol peyote cult.

The exhibit, curated by anthropologist Peter T. Furst, who has been involved with Huichol artists since the inception of the yarn paintings, opened on November 8, 2003, and runs through March 30, 2004. (Please call 215-898-4045 for further



"Behind the seeming chaos of images, there is order and balance, a condition on which Huichols lay great stress." From *Visions of a Huichol Shaman*, #97-15-8.

information.) The exhibit will travel to other venues after the installation at UPM.

This is a unique opportunity to view a group of these extraordinary paintings in one gallery and to learn the messages and myths encoded in the work.

A companion volume, *Visions of a Huichol Shaman*, written by the curator (120 pp., 68 full-color illustrations, hardback \$29.95) is available at the Museum Shop or through Museum Publications (800-537-5487 or [www.museum.upenn.edu/publications](http://www.museum.upenn.edu/publications)).

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