

Transcript
The Mola, Interview

Raziel: The mola is a traditional textile art that the Kunas, which is a tribe in the Caribbean part of Panama and Colombia, custody as part of their tradition. It was originally inspired by geometric designs that the Kuna people draw in their bodies, but then it was heavily influenced by the Spanish textile techniques. Nowadays, it is widespread throughout the country, but the Kunas are the master artists of the mola. They consist of various layers of fabrics, sewed in geometric patterns or drawings of animals and nature in general. The mola has also become a source of income for the mola people since it is a very attractive craft for tourists.

Emily is a Kuna woman living in Panama that embraces her tradition and uses her amazing sewing talents to create mola designs and sell them to contribute to her household economy. She speaks Kuna or dulegaya, which is the original name of the language. I have known her ever since I was little because she is my childhood friend's mother. She agreed to talk to me about her point of view on the mola.

When I ask her about the role that the mola represents in her culture, she said to that for the Kuna culture, the mola is important because the Kuna women wear it.

So, exactly Emily how did you learn to sew molas?

She proceeds to talk about her culture and how it is part of her culture and how only women can wear it.

Emilciana: It is part of our culture. From a very young age, girls learn geometric drawing textile, cuts, etc. Anyway, it is this way that they teach us how to "sew mola."

Raziel: And indeed, girls are the only one who can dedicate themselves to keep the tradition. Mola for Kuna people is not only a piece of textile art, it is also the name of the woman's traditional clothing. Women use them regularly and sadly, some of the youngest have decided not to wear it daily anymore. So, if only women can use mola, what do men wear?

Nicolino: Kuna men do not use molas. Men wear relatively normal or "occidental" clothing. In the past the man used fabrics with long sleeves, but with one color designs.

Raziel: That is Nicolino, Emilciana's husband. He is also part of the Kuna people. He speaks about the men clothing (translation).

Alright, what is necessary to sew a mola?

Emilciana: You will need fabrics in different colors, threads, a thimble, and a lot of skill so the mola could turn out well.

(translation)

Raziel: Skills are absolutely necessary. I tried to sew molas with Emily's help, however, my first mola seemed like a 5-year-old's drawing compared to Emily's craft.

What are the steps to create a mola?

Emilciana: The steps are:

- You will need great hand sewing skills
- Gather fabrics
- Draw geometric patterns
- The mola needs many layers of fabric so that there are colors underneath the other fabric at the bottom

The mola is sewed by hands with very little stitches.

(translation)

Raziel: Alright. And as a last question, Emily, how does the mola shape the concept of womanhood in your culture?

The mola is part of our culture. The Kuna woman represents her culture. She does the chores, supports her husband, cooks, cleans, takes the kids to school. The Kuna woman is proud of her culture and its traditions, and it represents Panama, her country, in the world to protect her culture and its traditions, especially the idiosyncrasy of her village, or even an entire nation.

(translation)

Raziel: Women all around the world have the role of keeping traditions alive and the Kuna women are not the exception.

This is Raziel Hernandez, a University of Arkansas student from Panama. Caroline Carper is the voice behind the translation. Emilciana Galvez is our Kuna Rockstar. Thank you for listening.