

SAFEGUARDING THE SEEDS OF HUMANITY'S FUTURE



INTERVIEW WITH SUSANA VALADEZ

Founder and Director of

THE HUICHOL CENTER FOR CULTURAL SURVIVAL AND TRADITIONAL ARTS

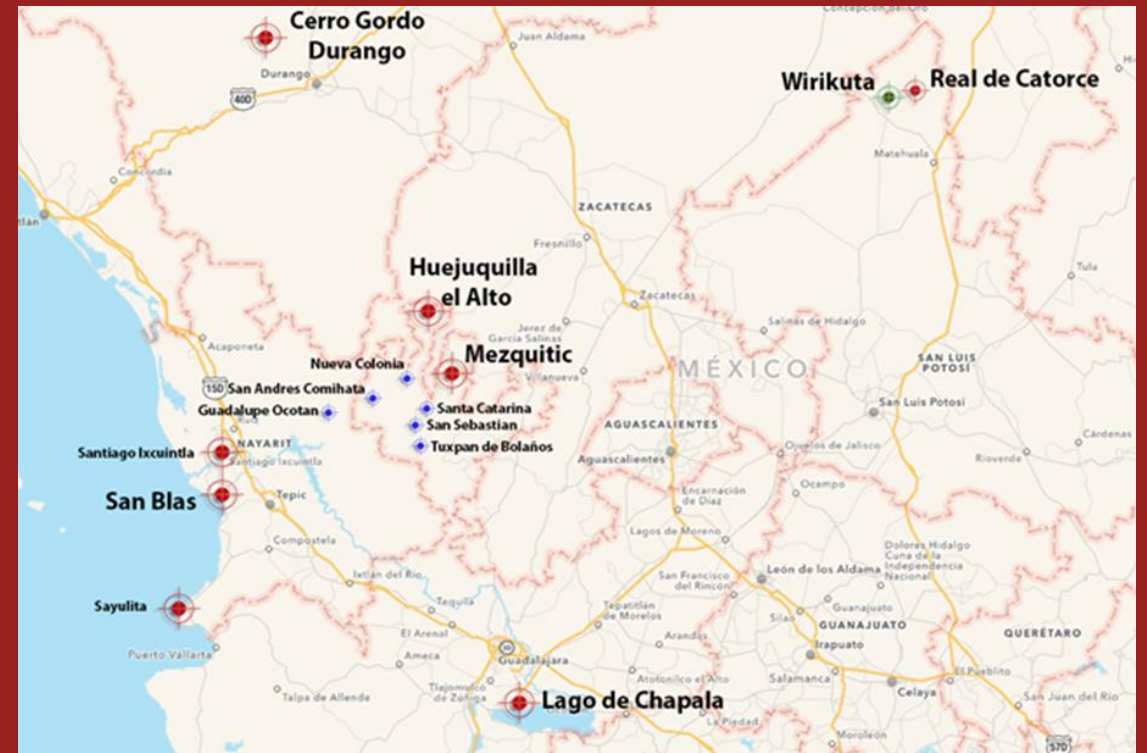
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PART 1: WHO ARE THE WIXÁRIKA?



A Shamanic Tribe That Carries The Solutions For Humanity's Survival



The matrix of the Wixárika territory is home to approximately 8,000 people. It is located in scattered communities in the mountains of Nayarit and Jalisco, near Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco. Their sacred pilgrimage routes extend to coastal Nayarit, southern Jalisco, Durango, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí.



Frozen in time, hidden away deep within the steep canyons of west Mexico's interior, is the treasure of the Sierra Madre, the indigenous Wixárika (Weej-RAH-lee-kah) people, commonly referred to as the Huichol (Wee-CHOL).



For centuries this vibrant pre-Colombian culture has inhabited an awe-inspiring native habitat which, until recently, was a natural barrier to the encroachment of modern civilization.



Echoes of antiquity resonate throughout Wixárika life and homeland, where the sites, sounds, beauty and wisdom of their paleo hunter-and-gathering ancestors infuse the ceremonies. The living legacy that survives in perpetuity today dates back to the times of Quetzacoatl, the mythical Aztec Feathered Serpent, from their pre-Columbian past.



The rituals practiced by these stewards of Mother Earth breathe life into the soul and spirit of the universe, from the subterranean matrix of life to the celestial realm of enlightenment.



Their ancient roots reach down to humanity's deepest core, where relationships of reciprocity were forged between humans and their divine counterparts. These alliances of give-and-take with nature provide the physical and spiritual tools needed for survival in their harsh environment.



Over eons of time, these guardians of nature adapted to the rugged topography of their surroundings. The Wixárika way of life gave birth to a profound spirituality, based on the co-evolution of the human animal with the human spirit.



Nature spirits, ancestral souls, plants, animals, minerals and elements are appealed to and personified. Communication between the people and their spirit allies is an archaic practice carried forward by the Wixárika into modern times.



The divine forces of nature, thought of as beloved sentient beings, are referred to in familial terms, such as the Rain Mothers, the Corn Mother, Father Sun, Grandfather Fire and Brothers Deer and Wind.



The presence of goddesses such as Mother Fertile Earth, Grandmother Growth, the Cloud Mothers and others, permeate the Wixárika landscape with the divine feminine life force.



The rituals in this culture of shamanism light their way to multiple planes of awareness, where ordinary reality is suspended, and their mythical minds are activated.



In this altered state of consciousness they embark on transcendental journeys to other dimensions, multiverses where they gain access to vast libraries of esoteric knowledge.



Participants in the ceremonies are overcome with emotion as they align themselves with their ancestors and the soul of nature. Their tears express their deepest gratitude for the abundance, health, wisdom and supernatural powers they receive from the spirit world.



Shamans and apprentices revere Mother Nature's time-honored plant teacher, the visionary peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*). When they ingest a special peyote mandala they refer to as their "nierika", they transcend the limits of their rational conscious minds and open the "doors of perception" to the multiverses of higher consciousness.



The visionary peyote cactus contains mescaline, the psychoactive ingredient that unveils the most profound secrets of nature to the Wixárika practitioners.



The shamans access the multidimensional energy fields of their prime creators, where they meld with the masterminds behind nature, and tap into innate universal wisdom.



Peyote is used in the ceremonies to open up channels of communication between humans and other sentient life forms radiating out from the center of their universe.



The shamans use their magical-power objects to interface with the immortals and translate their messages to and from the spirit world. Feathered wands, gourd bowls, candles, and arrows transmit and receive communications from Elder Brother Blue Deer, the interdimensional go-between.



Each new generation of Wixárika shamans gains access to repositories of mystical knowledge from the non-physical realms they consult with in their ceremonies and lucid dreams. Their powers maintain the delicate balance between life and death, sickness and health, abundance and misfortune.



The knowledge they retrieve from tapping into the fundamental forces of the universe is the wellspring of their shamanic powers. The abilities of these revered practitioners of divination and energetic healing include communication with departed souls, predictions of the location of the deer for the hunters, rainmaking and remote viewing.



Wixarika folk tales impart that there are certain master shamans among them who are able to transcend the boundaries of the physical realm and metamorphose into animal-people. For thousands of years, shape-shifting was an integral part of archaic shamanic practices, that have now been long lost to most of humanity.



The shamans use their hands and power objects to tap into energy fields that channel life force and healing light to their patients. They negotiate with their unseen animal allies from other dimensions to magically absorb the illness, in exchange for ceremonies that will be held to compensate their spirit helpers.



Healing with light is the vocation of every shaman, a sacred skill that is mastered by apprentices when they make pilgrimages to the holy peyote lands in the east. The initiates who make this journey participate in peyote ceremonies, where they learn the secrets of Wixarika mysteries. Their visions are later recorded in an art form known as yarn painting, which provide glimpses into the supernatural world.



Under the tutelage of master shamans, groups of temple officers embark on their divine mission, following in the footsteps of the ancestors who charted the course of this spiritual quest.



The journey to the sacred peyote desert, “Wirikuta”, is a time honored practice that the Wixárika people continue to safeguard as their unique living legacy.



Before embarking on the long trek, the peyote pilgrims appeal to the prime creators for permission to make the difficult journey to Wirikuta, and pray for their protection and safety.



This magical desert, the “Land Where Our Mothers Dwell”, is the heart and soul of Wixárika spiritual traditions. It is the only natural habitat of peyote in Mexico, and is located three hundred miles to the east of their homeland.



The council of elder shamans assigns each temple officer to a particular deity or nature spirit for a five-year cycle. In return for their devotional stewardship to these entities, they are gifted peyote visions that gain them entry into their soul's "classroom" of eternal learning. Their main teacher is their wise old Grandfather Fire, Tatewari.



On their original journey to Wirikuta, the ancestors stopped along the way to pay homage to the spirits inhabiting the springs, caves and peaks in designated power spots. The peyoteros reaffirm their sacred covenants with the immortal ancestors at these sites.



When the travelers carry the offerings made by their family members to each location, the spirits who receive the gifts are invigorated. The candles, arrows, gourd bowls, pictographs and other votive objects stimulate the sacred grid, like energizing acupuncture points on the planetary body of Mother Earth.



The reciprocity that flows between the guardians of the sacred places and their human caretakers is a reflection of the harmonious co-existence between the spiritual and material dimensions.



This alignment with the spirit world balances the duality between their biological, material lives, with their hidden halves, as eternal spiritual beings.



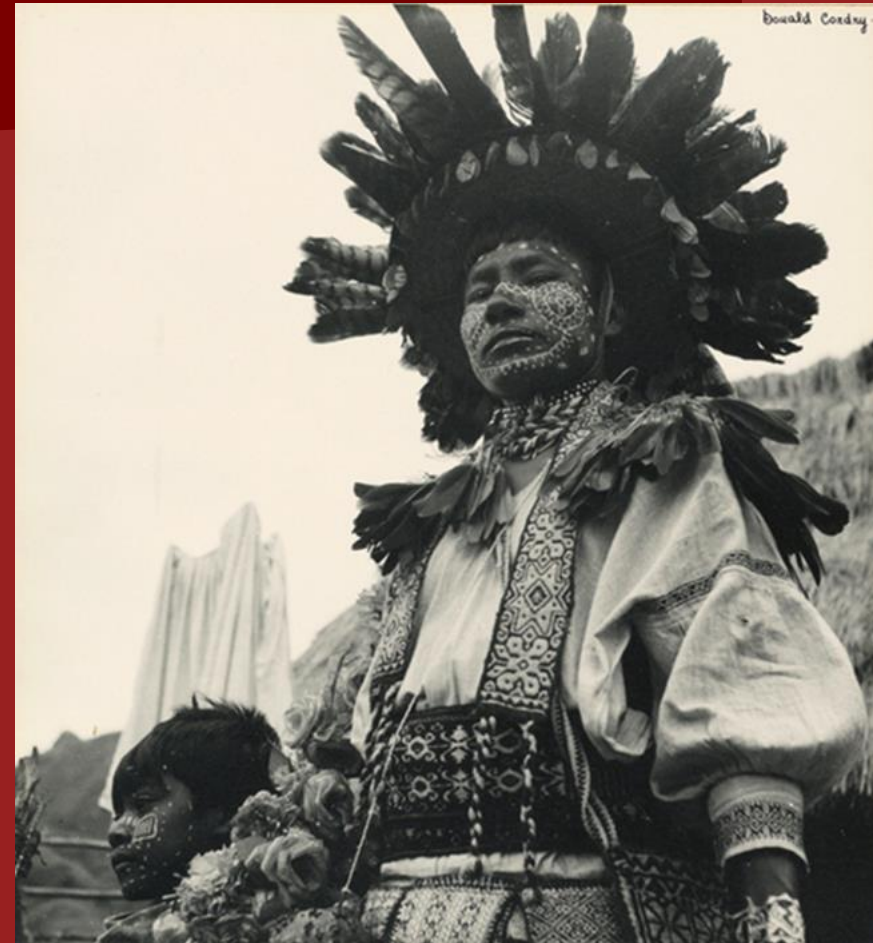
Before entering Wirikuta, the land where the heart of the deer transformed into peyote, the hunters paint their faces and become “mirrors of the gods.”



Musicians adorn their instruments with peyote designs that help them channel the divine melodies and lyrics they play throughout the journey. The music and dancing creates sacred space, where the deities are entertained, and, in return, receive the petitions and prayers of the people.



The tribe lives in support of each individual on the collective journey, because as each person's path to enlightenment is completed, it contributes to the ongoing building of a body of knowledge that gets carried forward.



These guardians of Mother Earth vow to protect her soul, the spirit of the universe. Their human souls align with her core knowledge, which eventually leads them to discover their purpose in life.



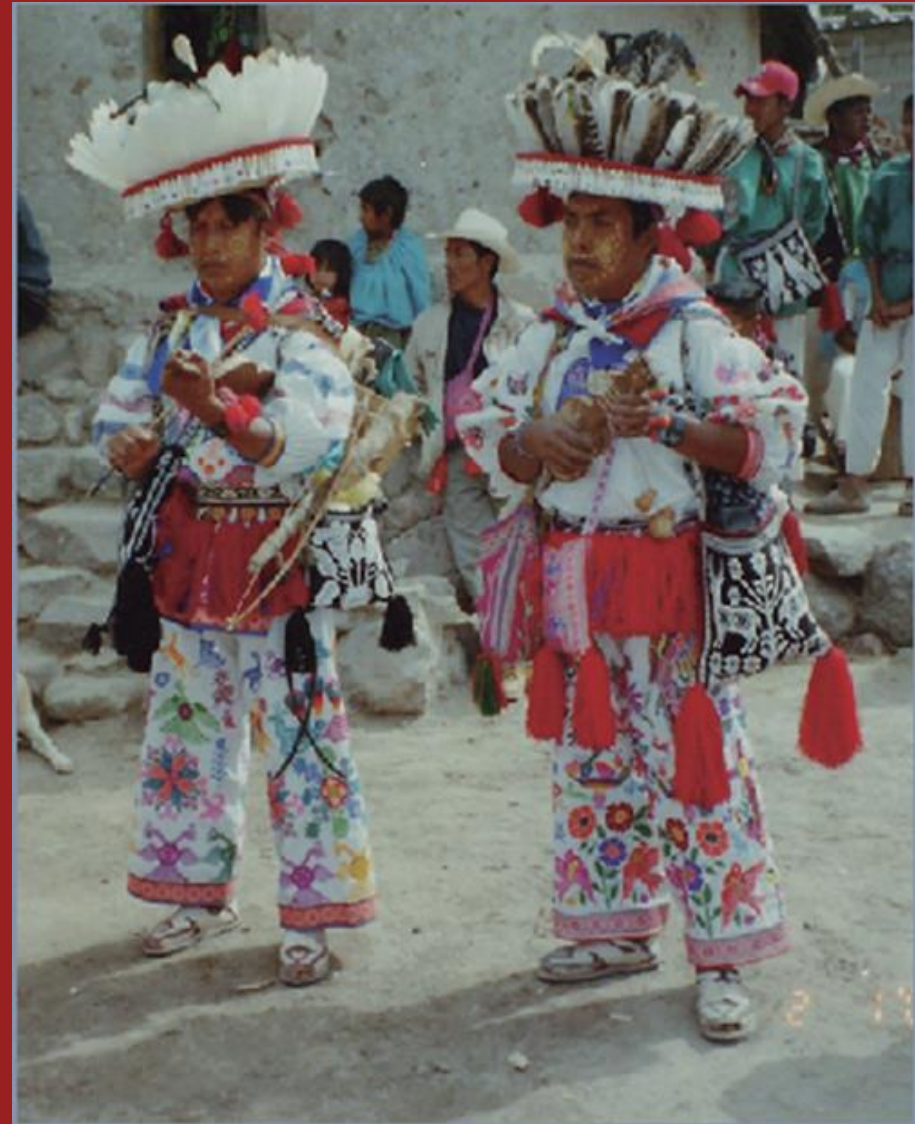
When the “peyoteros” return from their votive journey, they prepare the divine cactus to share with family and community members who remained behind.



A ceremony takes place to acknowledge the completion of their obligations to the creators, who are thanked for their safe return. The memories and revelations of their pilgrimage are shared in detail.



The venerated elders oversee the sacred rituals when hundreds of participants consume large amounts of peyote. Past, present and future intersect as the ecstatic effects of the sacred cactus psychically connects them to one another and to the planetary and universal life force.



The musicians share the songs they composed for the dances performed by the peyoteros at each stopping place. The music is an integral part of every ceremony, because it fine tunes the vibrations of humans to the harmonic resonance of the universe.



The ceremonial dances reconnect the cyclical time keepers with the routines and seasons of nature, attuning them to the rhythms of life.



Throughout the ceremonial cycle, families and community members reunite to participate in rituals that serve to collectively give thanks to, and reaffirm their stewardship to the life giving forces of nature.



Ceremonies mark the eternal return of the changing seasons on the cosmic calendar. All throughout the dry and wet seasons, age-old fertility rituals take place to consecrate the fields and ensure the germination of the seeds for future abundance.



Each new generation receives the memories and messages passed down to them by the elders, adding more knowledge to the age-old continuum of their collective indigenous wisdom throughout the annals of time.



Everyone is born with an “iyari”, their heart-memory, which grows throughout their lifetime. Initiation rituals early in life introduce them to the deities that will nourish each child’s iyari, and eventually connect them to the sum total of the collective tribal memory.





In their first rites of passage, Wixárika babies are given names that correspond to the growth stages of corn. The growth of human children is believed to parallel the life cycle of the corn children.



The elders carefully observe the youngsters, and pay special attention to the ones who show an affinity towards the shamans, their chants, dances, the peyote and their power objects.



Participation of children is a vital component of the ceremonies. Their long spiritual path as the guardians of the traditions begins with the step by step instructions they receive from their mentors.



Growing up Wixárika automatically enrolls them in the “school of esoteric studies.” Shamanic practices are molded into their consciousness as small children, which predisposes them as they grow older to succeed on the path to spiritual awareness.



During the drum ceremony, which celebrates the harvest, the shaman teaches the children about the disciplines required of them in order to become masters of the shamanic arts. He escorts them, in his chants, on an imaginary journey to the cardinal points, where they gain their first glimpse into the peyote universe.



Shamans are the storytellers, the guardians of the oral traditions. Mythical entities and culture heroes are brought to life through the retelling of the creation stories, remembered and passed down through the ages.



Role models inspire the children to triumph over the disciplines and obstacles that await them. The apprentices look up to older initiates, farther along the path, who encourage them to stay on course.



Wixárika children are the messengers of what their people have carried forward for thousands of years, and the incubators of the seeds to humanity's future.



Over the course of their lifetimes, their devoted service to the prime creators evolves them into whole human beings who have fulfilled the promise of their existence.



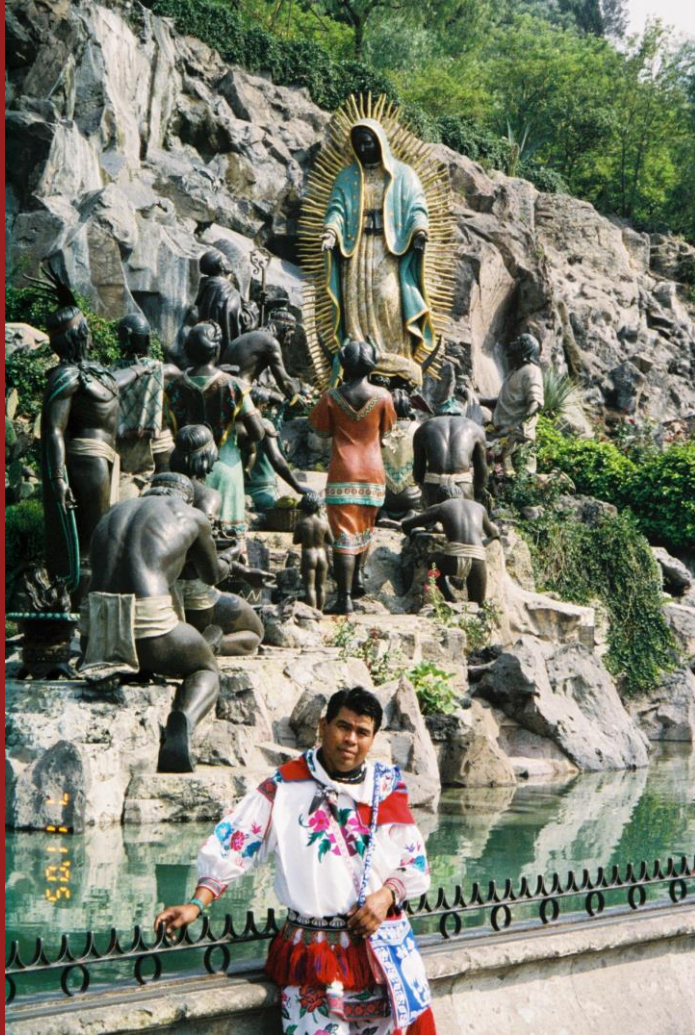
As the individuals who complete their spiritual paths ascend to higher levels, they light the way for others to evolve. The Wixárika, an ancient tribe in the modern world, are the way-showers forward on the cosmic map to higher consciousness. Their seeds of wisdom can help all of humanity grow.



The light of the human spirit unlocks the indigenous wisdom that is needed to rekindle the collective heart-memories of humankind. This will ascend the inhabitants of Planet Earth to a new paradigm, one that supports quality of life and peaceful coexistence for all.



Sadly, the candles are burning low for the present generation of Wixárika children, who are fast being assimilated into the dominant culture and religion.



Over the years, Catholic missionaries have successfully synthesized deities and patron saints into the Wixárika pantheon. The Holy Spirits have been fused with the Wixárika prime creators, and are idolized as divine messengers.



Now that the children are obligated to attend the government schools built in the homeland, the vulnerable youngsters are swayed away from their spiritual core. Their ceremonies and traditions become less of a priority, as the students lose interest in the old ways.



As the voices of the elders become echoes of the past, their words of wisdom may no longer fall upon the ears of the corn children.



Perhaps he is one of the last in line to inherit his precious Wixarika legacy.

PART 2: WHO IS SUSANA VALADEZ? - GUARDIAN OF THE GUARDIANS



“Never forget, no matter how overwhelming life’s challenges and problems seem to be, that one person can make a difference in the world. In fact, it is always because of one person that all the changes that matter in the world come about.” Buckminster Fuller

FROM LAKE MICHIGAN TO TENOTCHTITLAN



Valley of Mexico, 16th Century

I was born in the metropolis of Chicago in 1951, but Mexico has been my home for over forty years. I live in a land where indigenous cultures have endured the test of time, where the ancient past intersects with modern life. I immersed myself into one of these cultures, and discovered hidden truths that not only changed the course of my life, but may very well help chart the course for the future of humanity.



My first visit to the Wixarika homeland



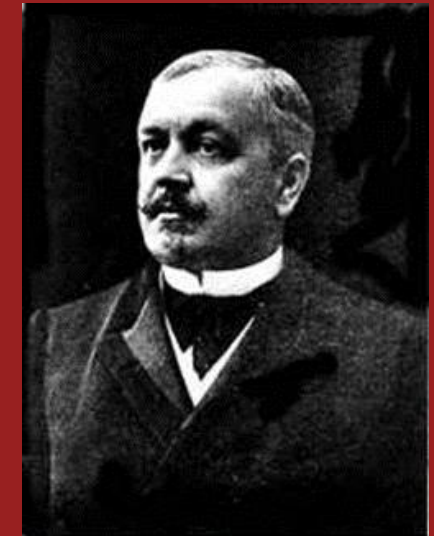
In 1975, while doing research for a Masters dissertation in Latin American Studies at UCLA, I saw a film about a secluded culture in Mexico, the “Wixárika”, who live in a colorful vibrant world of magic and mysticism. There was much to be learned from people who remember and practice the old ways. So I embarked on a scholarly quest to see if I could be of help to them, while documenting their way of life, language, plants, shamanism and visionary art for posterity.



Carl Lumholtz, Norway
Fieldwork 1890-1910



Susana Eger Valadez, USA
Fieldwork 1975-present



Leon Diguët, France
Fieldwork 1893-1900



Konrad Theodor Pruess,
Germany
Fieldwork 1907-1914

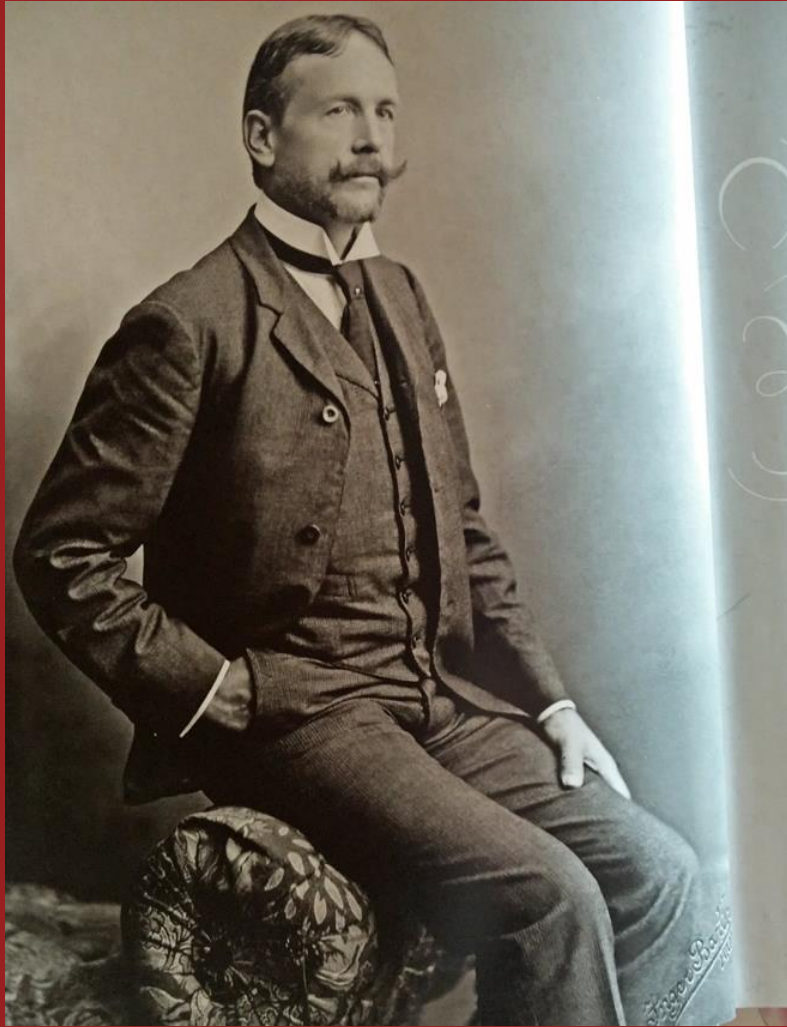
Anthropologists from the 1890's and
early 20th century paved the way
for my ethnographic explorations into
Mexico's remote Sierra Madre Occidental.



Robert Lowry Zingg, USA
Fieldwork 1934-1945



Norwegian anthropologist Carl Lumholtz inspired my life's work with the Wixárika people. He was the first ethnographer to document a treasure trove of their art and iconography, including votive art, shamanic paraphernalia, decorative art, textiles, photographs, sacred songs, music and more.



The remarkable collections of Carl Lumholtz from the 1890s are housed at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, Norway, with over 1400 nitrate photo negatives, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, with over 2,500 negatives.



Carl Lumholtz 1898

I was 24 years old when I set out to follow the footsteps, or shall I say mule tracks, of Carl Lumholtz into the rugged Wixárika homeland. I could never have imagined that I was embarking on a path that would lead me to discover the purpose of my life, and, in the process, help many others to find theirs.



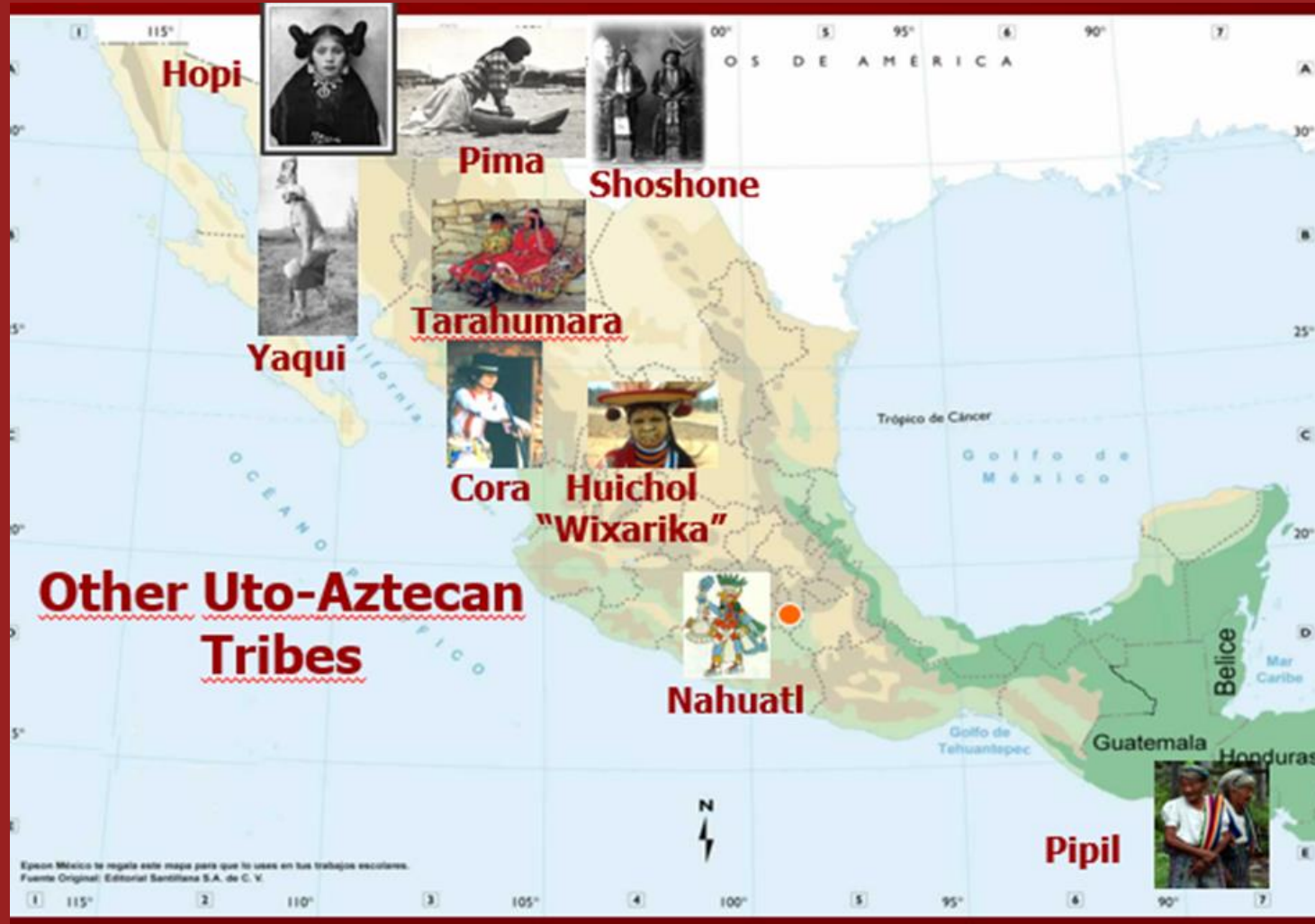
In the Wixarika homeland, everyday life is superimposed upon a background of steep slopes, forbidding cliffs, deep river valleys, and layers of eroded gorges. If my urban mom had known where I was headed, she would have never let me leave home!



The first task at hand would be to gain the approval and obtain permission from the Wixárika to live, learn, and work among them. After presenting myself to the tribal authorities, I was taken in by a hospitable family. They provided me housing at their extended family-ranch in exchange for food, beads, threads, cloth and sewing needles they could use to continue their cultural tradition of embroidery and beadwork.



I presented my letters of recommendation to the leaders, who ruled over the communities and mandated with autonomy. They are denoted by the wooden staffs with ribbons they carry.



The Wixárika language pertains to the Uto-Aztec linguistic family and was an unwritten language until the 1960's when it was transcribed by evangelists. Many of the men who had ventured into the outside world were able to communicate with me in broken Spanish. Most women only spoke Wixárika.



Every homestead has a special building , a family shrine, that represents the womb of the family lineages. Ritual paraphernalia is stored inside the offering bags, while seeds, candles, arrows, copal incense, feathers, gourd bowls, cornmeal, holy water, chocolate and deer are presented on the altars.



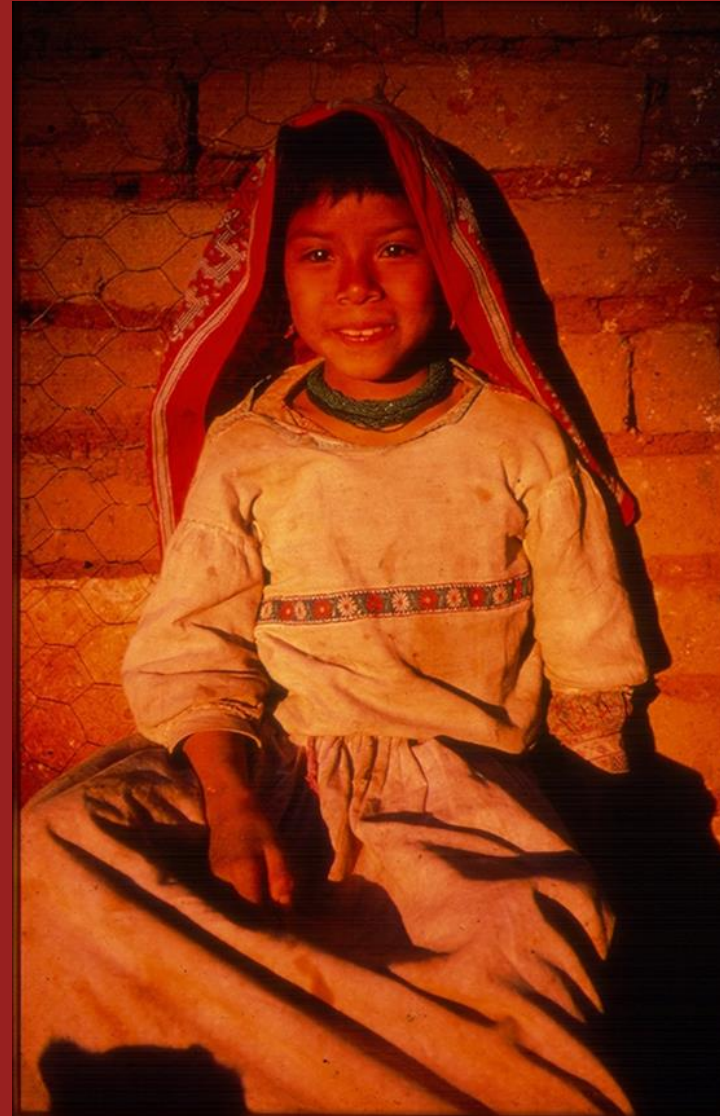
Cilau Valadez



Rituals to honor deities and departed loved ones take place inside the “God’s Houses”.



Ancient strains of corn seeds are safeguarded every year, and stored in the rafters until planting time.



The Wixárika people barely survive in extreme poverty. Living among them taught me that while they are brutally poor in economic resources, they are rich with the things that money can't buy. In spite of their dire circumstances, their lives are whole and authentic, filled with meaning and love.



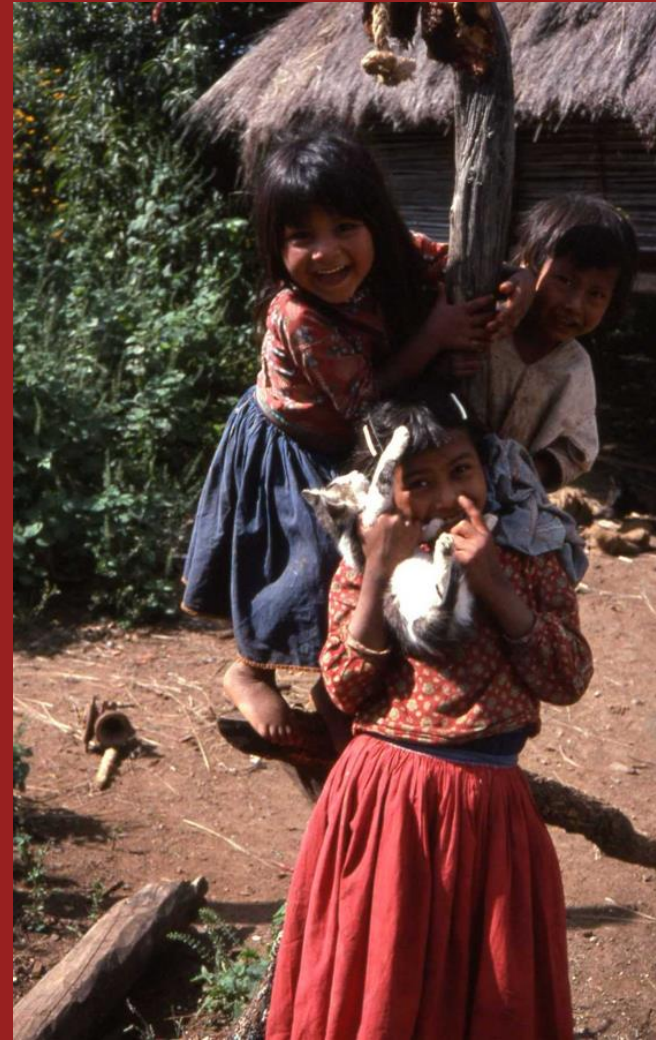
I was fascinated by their way of life, and soon adapted to living for long spans of time without the comforts and conveniences of my previous life style. It took a while for me to figure out how to use my skills and talents to be of service to them, in exchange for their gift of trust and friendship.



My hosts and I were curious to learn all about each other, which resulted in a lot of laughter between us. As the outsider, I was always the object of their ridicule, whispers and giggling. While we could not converse verbally, we all shared the common language of humor. There's nothing like an uproarious joke to break the ice between strangers.



My women friends gave me a Wixarkika make-over, dressing me in their finery, and transforming me into a woman of many colors.



I got along great with their loving children, and arranged to bring them kittens to help families solve their rodent infestation. There are many dogs and cats named after me, generations later!

WIXARIKA PLANT KNOWLEDGE



All family members pitch in with the hard work in the cornfields. Maize, beans and squash are the main staples of the Wixárika diet, which is why insuring abundant harvests is the matrix of their spirituality. The vast amount of Wixárika traditions stem from placating the forces of nature, with gratitude for the many blessings they provide throughout the agricultural cycle.



Once I settled in, I began researching their vast knowledge of edible, medicinal and useful plants. The Wixárika people and the plant kingdom are inextricably linked, and communicate with one another on an intuitive level. The children are all experts in ethno-botany.



The women forage for dinner, the children collect seeds and the men weave fibers into hats.



Their indigenous knowledge about the plant world is an impressive contribution to the human record. I couldn't help wondering if the tubers the woman was digging out of the riverbed might be an undiscovered rocket fuel, or perhaps the root of the bush could prolong longevity.



Uutuuxa yakwa, edible



Miguel Carrillo Gonzales, Botanical Consultant



Mai jrapah, edible



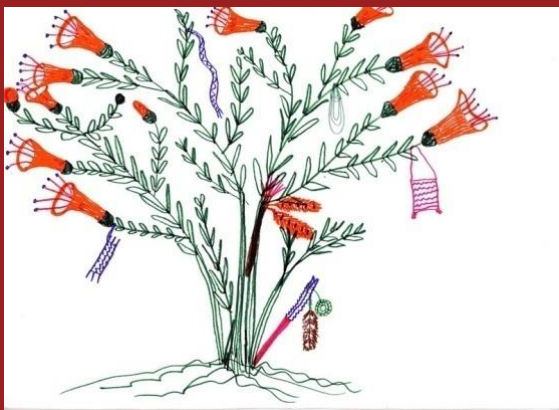
Kwiamuuxra, native cotton



Mai juu, roofing material



Wixárika knowledge of the flora in their biodiverse habitat is encyclopedic, and every effort must be made to document it before it fades from memory into oblivion.



Visionary plant



Native super glue



Natural blue dye



Genital infections

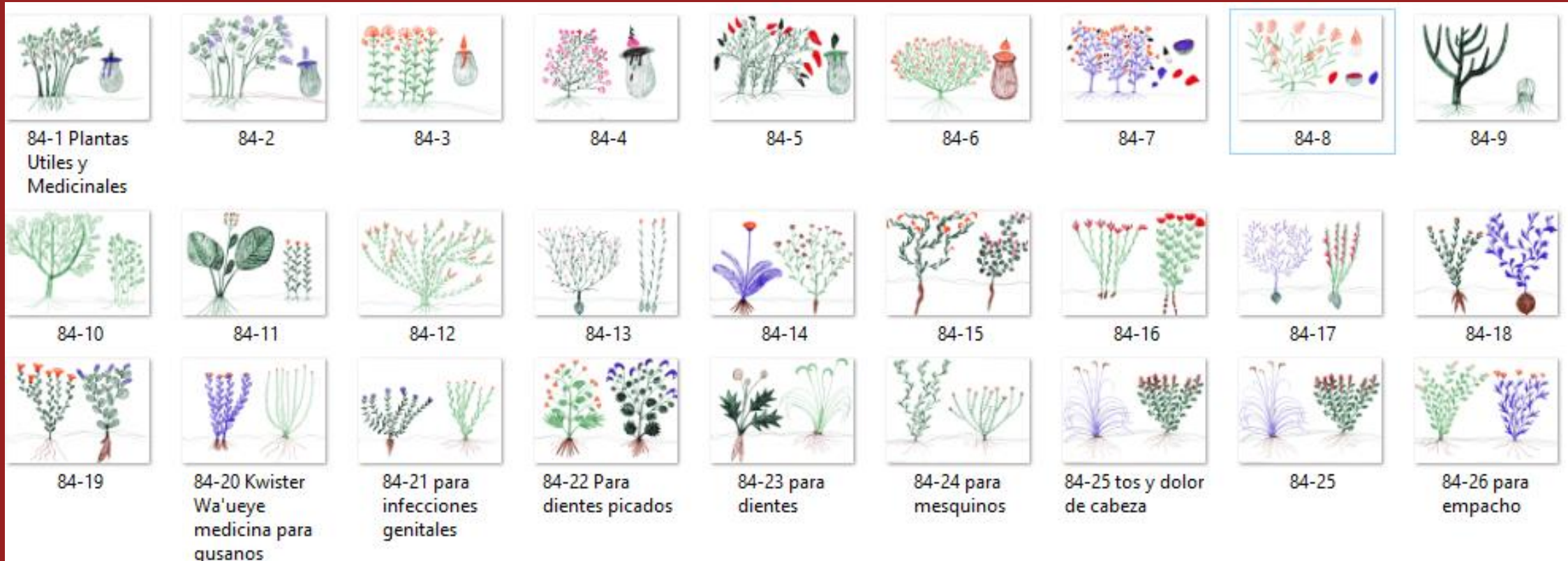


Scorpion stings



Intestinal parasites

One shaman in particular, Santos Aguilar Carrillo, concurred with me about the urgency to create a compendium of Wixárika botanical knowledge. He drew hundreds of sketches of the plants, and provided detailed information that I was able to archive. Our collaboration lasted for decades, until his untimely death.



Santos was a keen observer of nature, and his drawings tapped into a wellspring of shamanic and folk knowledge about the magical properties of plants.

LIFE IN THE WIXARIKA KITCHEN



"Guaje" Tree Bean Pods



Nopal cactus and prickly pear fruit



Chilies



Cacao



Guavas



Wild plums



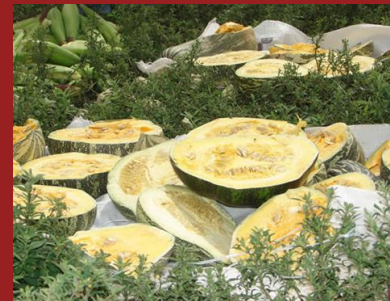
Beans



Maiz/Corn



Green Tomatoes



Squash



Monkey Pods

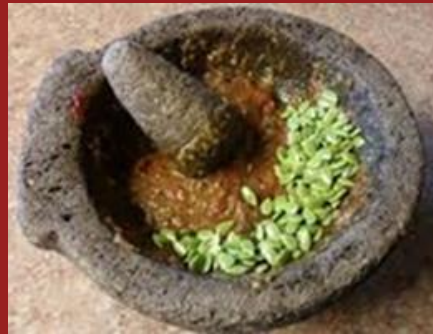


Amaranthe

The traditional Wixárika diet includes these foods, in addition to farm animals, dairy products, small game, deer, birds, fish, grasshoppers, bee larvae, honey and other crops that are foraged.



The women welcomed my helping hand in their kitchens, on open fires and woodburning stoves. While grinding corn or scraping the spines off the nopal cacti, I inadvertently carved out a vantage point from which to observe and participate in the every day activities of Wixárika life.



It took some practice for me to learn to use the grinding stones to make tortillas, and the mortar and pestle, instead of a blender, to make fillings.



Much of the time was spent by women in the kitchen, preparing food for their children and the large number of people attending the ceremonies and celebrations.



Food sharing at the ceremonies is an essential component of the social structure that strengthens bonds between people, feeds the hungry and keeps their communities strong.

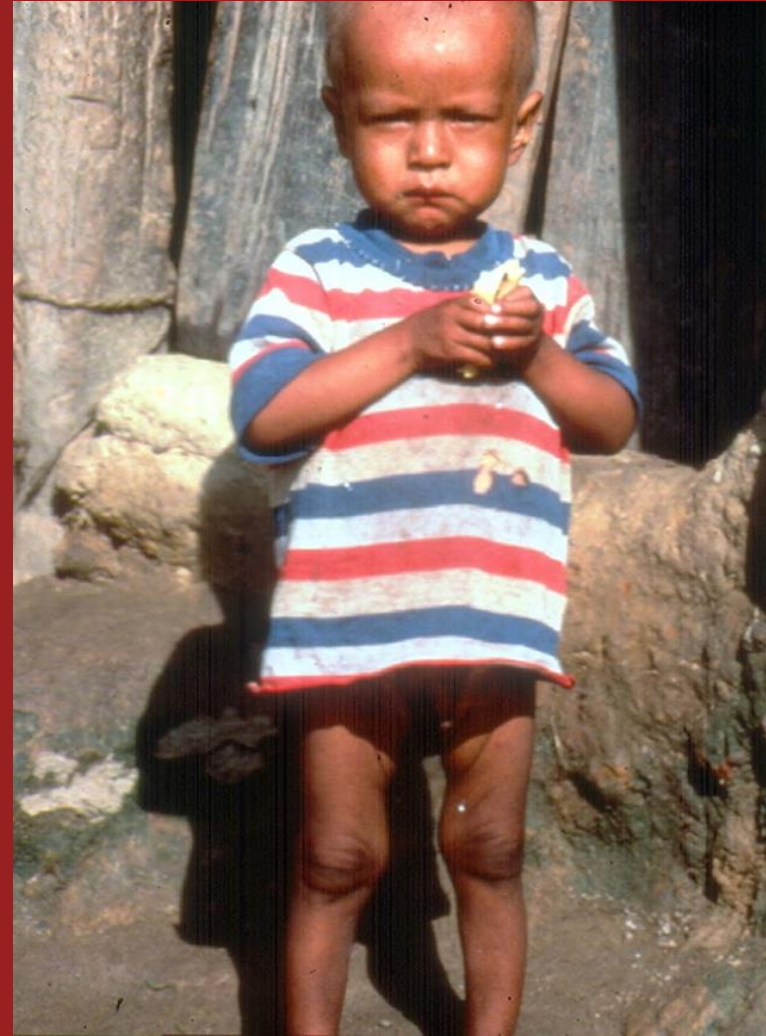


The hosts of the ceremonies go to great expense to purchase the required foods, such as bulls or lambs that are sacrificed to “feed” the deities. The preparation of fermented corn beer takes many days, while much time is spent adorning the ceremonial vessels.

TOO MANY HUNGRY WIXARIKA CHILDREN



Previously, the Wixárika economy was based on corn trading and barter. Recently however, as the dominant society introduces stores and vendors into their communities, they have to pay with cash. Now that they need money for subsistence, their autonomy and self-sufficient way of life is undermined, and poverty is on the rise.



For most Wixárika families, poverty and hunger is a fact of life. I was deeply moved when I learned about the alarmingly high rates of malnutrition and infant mortality in this fragile population.



I was shocked and saddened to learn that it is common for destitute parents to give away their starving children to friends or to other family members, or even worse, to put them up for adoption to Mexican families.



Government programs to assimilate the Wixárika people and natural resources into the mainstream of Mexican society has had a disintegrative impact on all areas of their traditional lives.



Inroads into the once isolated Wixárika homeland have introduced schools, government oversight, evangelists, lumber industries, mining, tourism, western medicine, alcoholism, cell phones and more.



The lack of income generating jobs in their communities is a major factor that chokeholds their economy in the grips of poverty. Every year people leave in massive numbers to seek seasonal employment wherever they can find it in the outside world.



Once the bus route on the new road was completed, there was no stopping the migration out of the communities. Many people courageously ventured out into the unknown world, as they were swept off their feet with the opportunity to go shopping!
But how could they afford to buy things?



The communities emptied out for months at a time, as entire families left the protection of their homeland and migrated to the tobacco fields of coastal Nayarit.



Pregnant women gave birth in the fields and cradled their infants with tobacco leaves.
There is no real shelter for the children to get out of the way of crop dusters.



The fields were sprayed with toxic insecticides, and sadly, the discarded containers were retrieved and reused as water jugs.



Children form a large part of the labor force, and live in the worst conditions imaginable, for meager wages. Their lack of immunity to outside “civilized” diseases makes them highly vulnerable to many life threatening illnesses such as whooping cough, measles and tuberculosis.

THE RACE AGAINST THE WIXARIKA DOOMSDAY CLOCK

Far too often many of the migrant tobacco field workers never made it back home, or when they did, they infected family members with diseases from the outside world. Their lack of immunity and the devastating effects of malnutrition compounded the epidemics, which took their toll on young and old.

I could not helplessly stand by while so many people were dying off. The shamans, who were quite overwhelmed by illnesses that were unknown to them, asked for my help.

As my anthropological research progressed, it became clear that Wixárika cultural survival was teetering on the brink of extinction. Too many outside influences were threatening to destroy the core of Huichol traditional life. Hence, what was once a scholarly investigation, evolved into a rescue and salvage effort. Time was of the essence.



There was a small clinic in the area where I was staying, but it was understaffed and understocked. There were no lab tests for common parasitic infections, nor were there much needed medicines. I sprang into action to bring doctors, equipment and medicines that expanded the clinic, before it was too late.



One solution was to bring in remedies to combat the diseases and build up their immunities. I made a concerted effort with friends and relatives in the US to amass a large donation of urgently needed medicines and equipment for the clinic. I was able to convince the Mexican government to fly everything down in a cargo plane from Los Angeles.

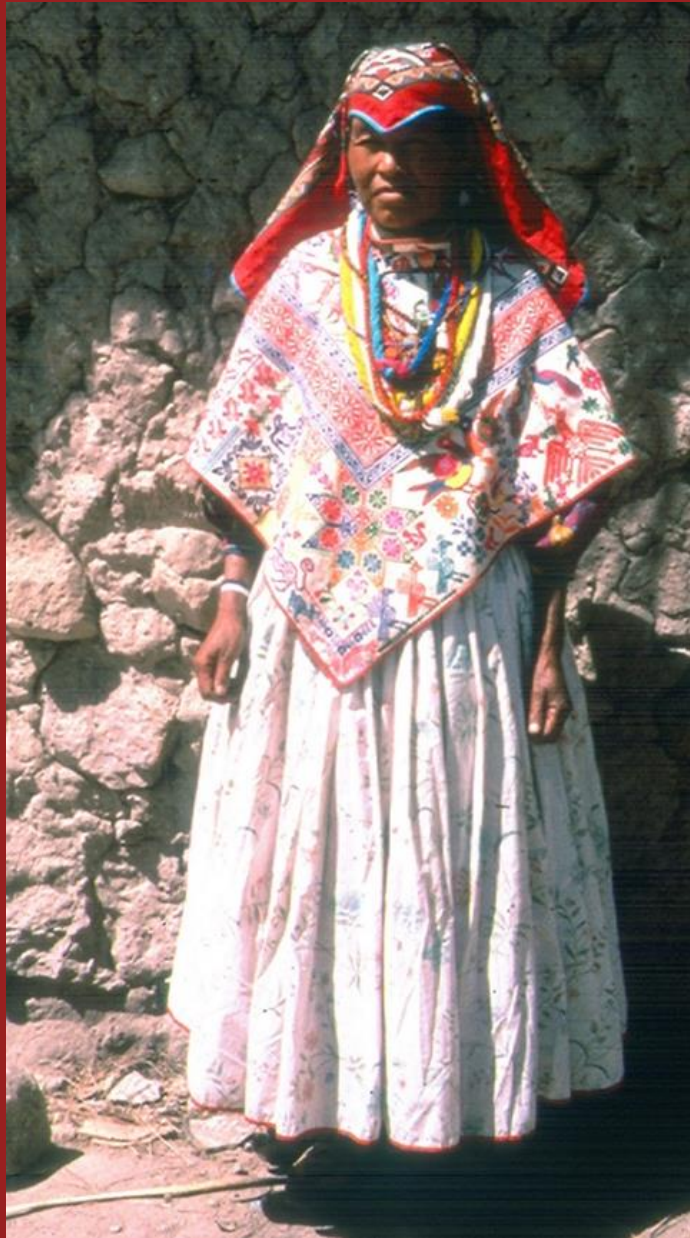


In the face of devastating epidemics, the shamans were willing to accept new cures in addition to their own. Mexican doctors were flown in to help combat and heal the unfamiliar illnesses that came to them in recent times.

LENDING A HELPING HAND: A STITCH IN TIME



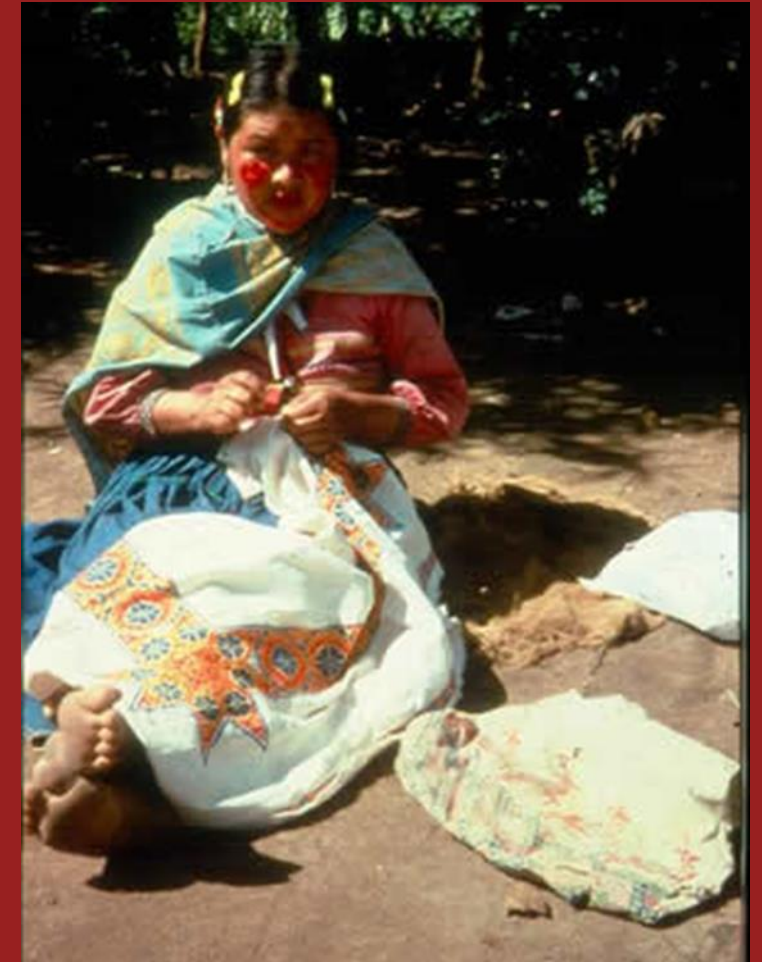
In an effort to stem the tide of migration to the tobacco fields, I initiated two projects to create culturally relevant jobs at home. “Transforming Field Hands to Creative Hands”, and, “Handcrafts, not Handouts”, were solutions I developed to help the talented needleworkers, beaders and weavers create objects of beauty that could be marketed to the global community.



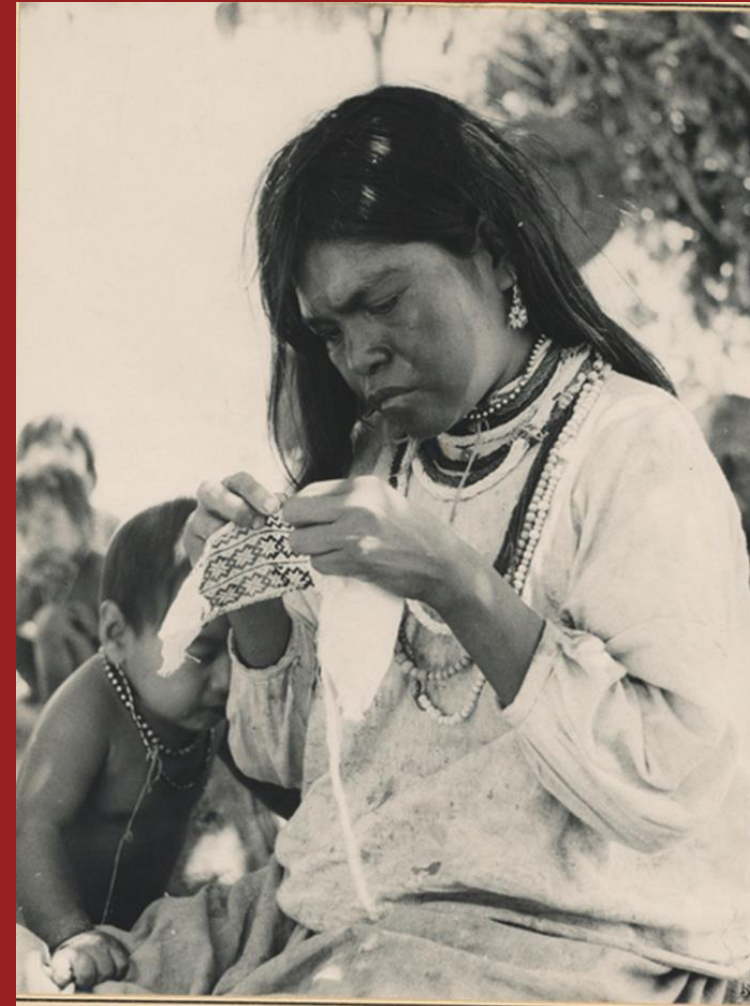
I would start by archiving their large inventory of embroidery patterns.



Zingg, 1938



Some of the designs are passed down by family members, while others are gifts to the women from their spirit guides. Whether inherited, or obtained in dreams and visions, the patterns hold special meaning for the artists.



Zingg, 1938

The patterns that are stitched onto the muslin fabric, such as latticework mandalas, royal eagles and little blue deer are not just fancy adornments. The symbols speak to the embroiderers through their needles and thread, as every stitch passes down messages from deep within the cultural memory.



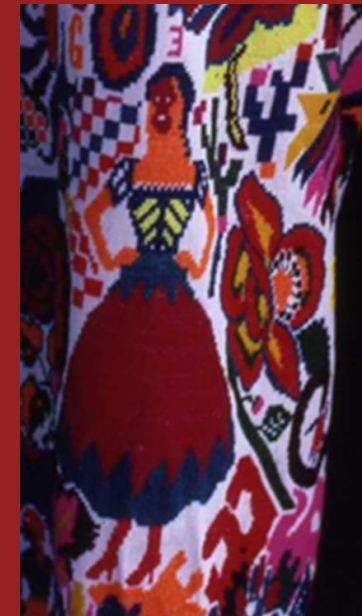
The intricate needlework designs replicate the vibrant colors of the psychedelic landscapes they experience in their peyote visions.



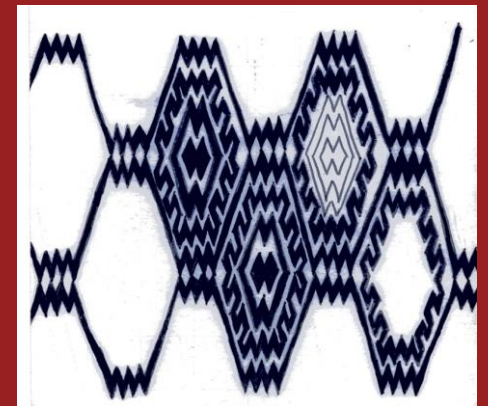
“Every time I sew a stitch I think about the numbers of stitches in my pattern, and the numbers of people and birds and animals and plants and how all of us are sewn together to create the beautiful design. And then I think about the goddess who’s sitting there in the spirit world with her needle and thread, stitching the world into the most perfect beautiful pattern, just like one I’m doing.” Utawima Carrillo



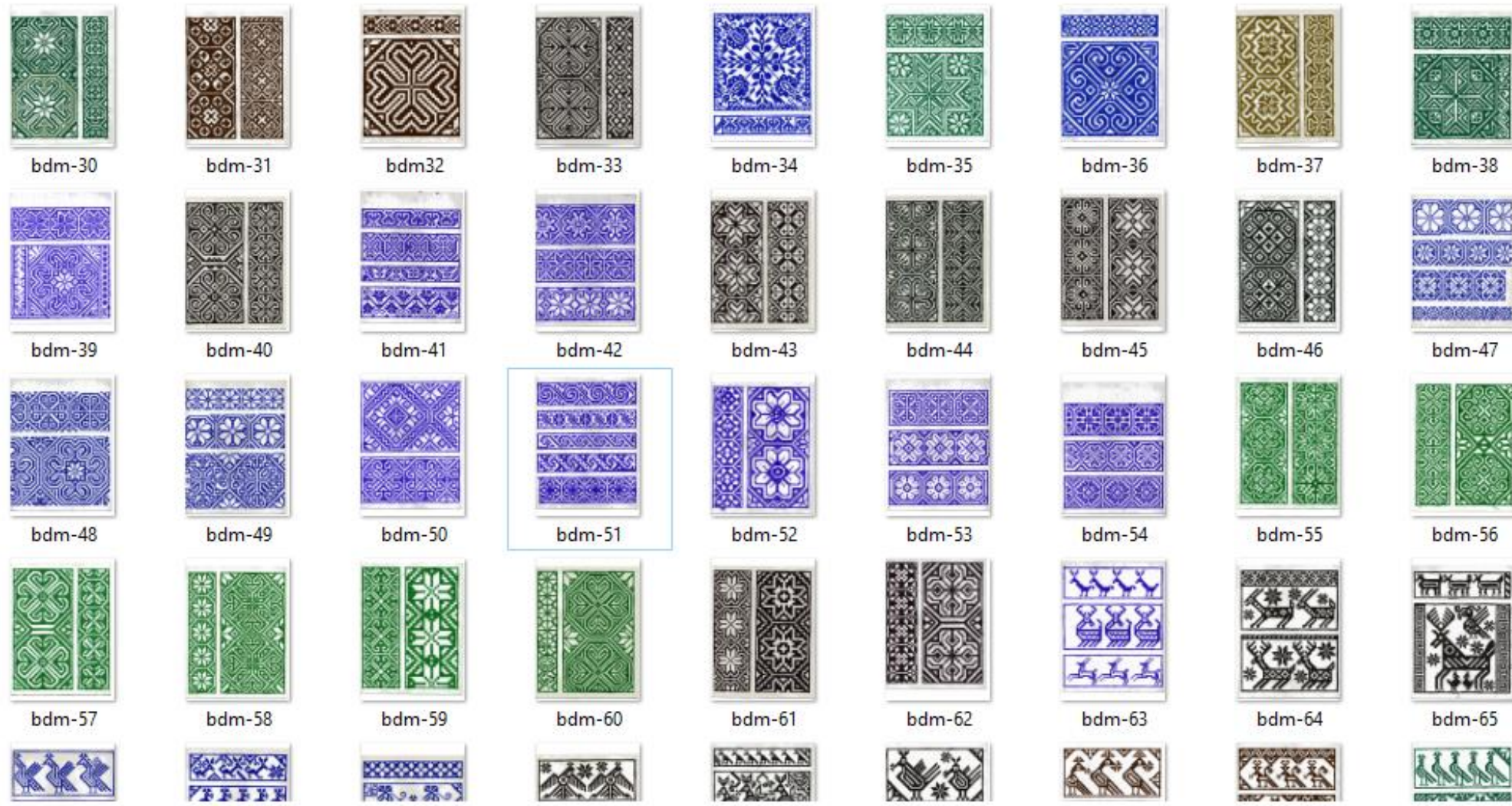
When I arrived the embroidery patterns resembled those first collected by Carl Lumholtz and other researchers from those times. Designs originating from commercial needlepoint pages, as now is the trend, were nowhere to be seen back then. Since the late 1980's stitchery has modernized from traditional symbols such as eagles and peyote visions, (photo on right) to decorative flowers (photo on left), copied from the latest Mexican folk art books.



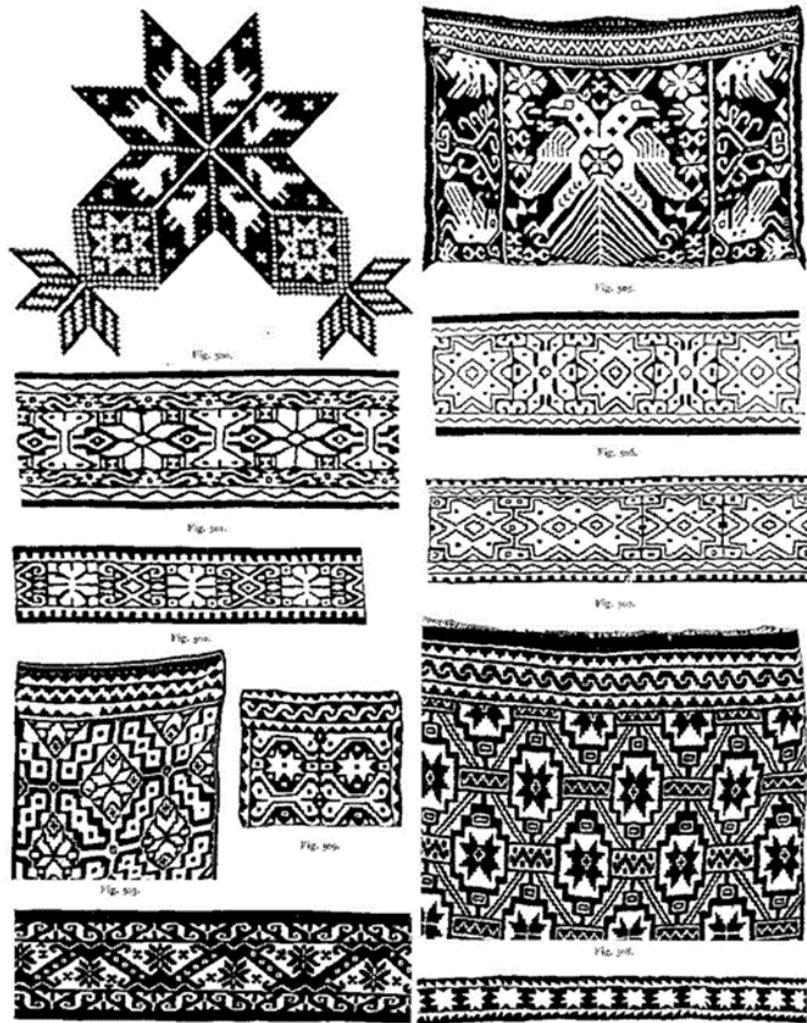
It was a race against time to record the traditional patterns before they were lost forever. There was no turning back the tide of trendy outside designs rapidly replacing them.



My first plan of action was to record as many designs as possible. I provided all “able handed women” with a source of income, by paying them to duplicate their patterns. Each design was then recorded on graph paper and made available to them so they could stockpile and access their own collections.



I converted hundreds of patterns into graph drawings and distributed them among the women. I hoped that Carl Lumholtz would proud to see how the cause he set into motion was being continued.



Figs. 500-510. Tóto' Designs.

Lumholtz 1898



Lumholtz 1898



Valadez 1976

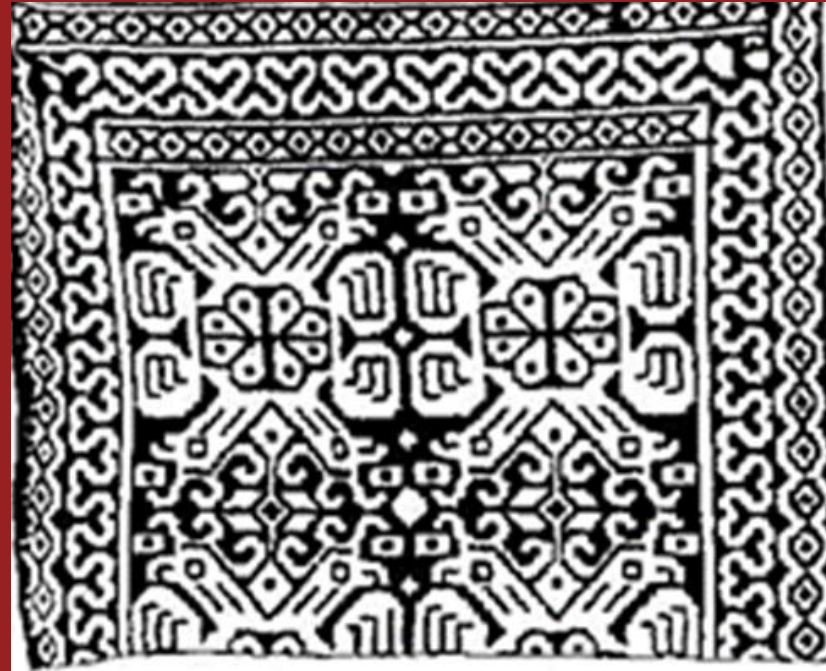


Lumholtz 1898



Valadez 1976

The embroidery collection and graphs retrieved many patterns that had been lost in certain regions. Patterns resembling the sketches made by Lumholtz were also recovered.



The colored patterns are modern versions of the black and white designs recorded by Carl Lumholtz, almost a hundred years earlier.



Once enough samples were compiled, I put the archive on display for the women to share and admire. I had color photo copies made, and began a Design Lending Library. This rekindled their enthusiasm for their traditional patterns, and rescued a disappearing art form.



The beautiful embroideries made by Wixárika women were shared with the world at an exhibit called “The Art of Being Huichol”, at the San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts, in 1979.



Over the next decade I continued providing jobs to many Wixárika people in their homeland. Artwork and artifacts were created for several museum exhibits that I organized and co-curated, including one at the San Diego Museum of Man, called "Mirrors of the Gods".



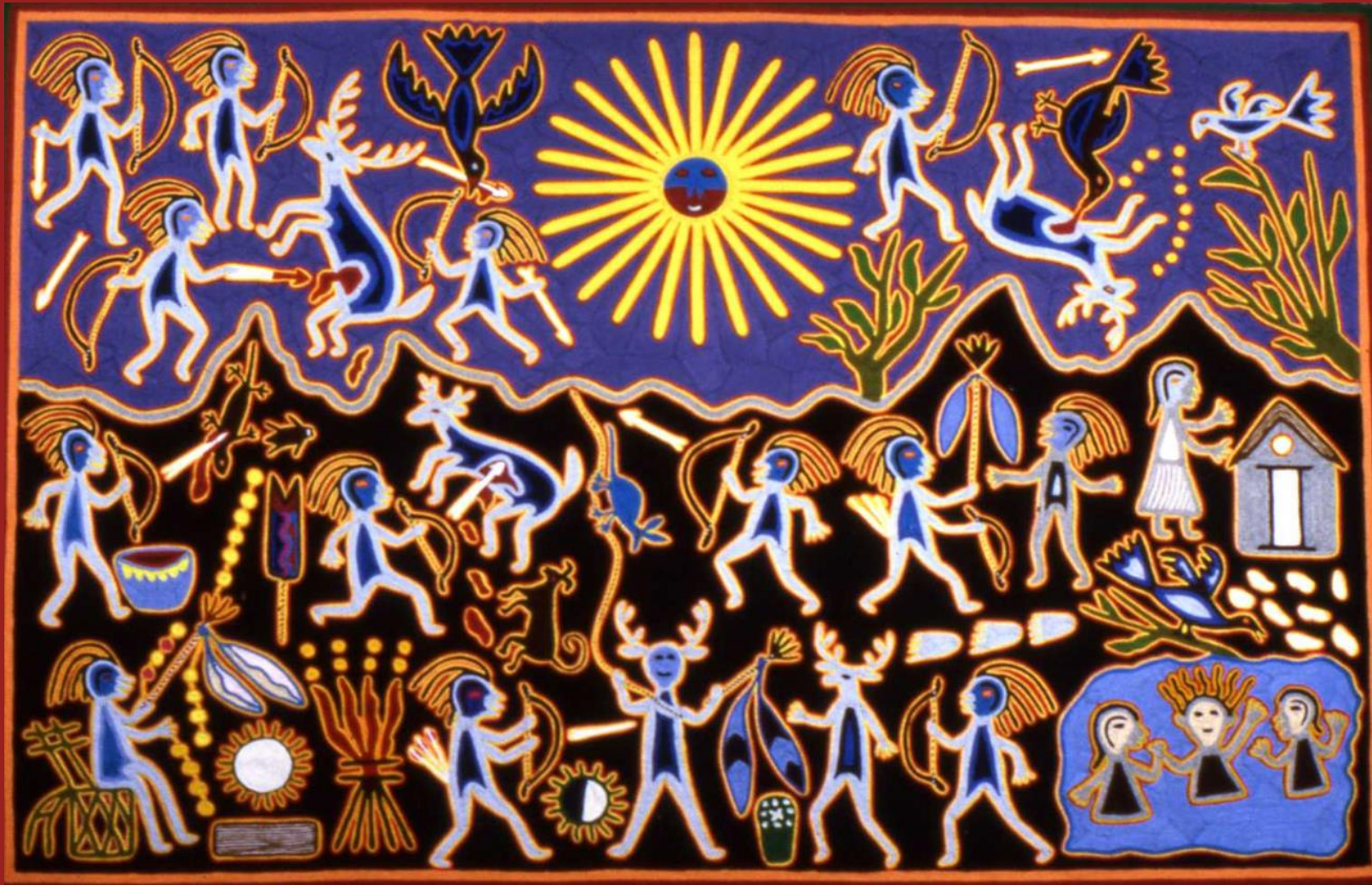
Diorama displays in the museums provided rare glimpses into Wixárika life for the visitors. It took two years to assemble the wide variety of artifacts that artists would create for each unit. The color and beauty of this unknown culture was now introduced to a global audience.

Every artist
that was able to remain
home with a job, was one
less casualty in the
tobacco fields.

COMMON THREADS



While seeking Wixárika artists to participate in an exhibit, I began a collaboration with yarn painter Mariano Valadez, whose work reminded me of the Aztec scribes.



Mariano's yarn paintings offered a rare glimpse into the landscape of other worlds, populated by beings with antlers and feathered antenna, shamans in ecstatic trances, creatures from the celestial realm, ancestors from the underworld and psychedelic symbols. This artistic medium allows him to share his first hand knowledge of the invisible Wixárika universe with the world.



The art of yarn painting is a prime example of how alternate realities co-exist with the linear mundane world. As the strands of yarn are embedded into the wax, threads of memory create pictographs that embody the spirit and essence of Wixárika peyote visions and oral traditions.



We were both aware of what an honor it was to represent Wixárika art and culture at the museums. It was also an opportunity to disseminate knowledge about their struggle for survival in the modern world.



Mariano and I shared the common thread of love for our mission to safeguard this precious legacy.



He and I came to love each other in the process, and then, so to speak, "tied the knot."



My mom's response to our marriage was, "Honey, if it makes you happy, that's all that matters".



I've always believed in our unalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, and I certainly found mine with my new family.



Mariano and I raised three children, now grown, all of whom share our commitment to assist the Wixárika people in the safeguarding of their cultural legacy.



Our three multi-cultural children, Rosy, Angelica and Cilau, now grown, had a unique upbringing, grounded in the awareness and appreciation of their Wixárika family history and roots.



Their grandma, aunts and uncles and cousins were all very much a part of our family life, and still are.



Left to right, Cilau, Angelica, Uncle Poncho (family shaman), Mariano, Cousin, Rosy seated, 2016

As adults, my children's family ties remain strong to their relatives residing in the remote homeland.



Angelica, the oldest, is a renowned jewelry designer and makes frequent trips to the distant communities.



Rosy earned her college degree, and is a high school Spanish teacher in California. Her students are well aware of her cultural heritage, and love when she wears her traditional clothing to class.



Rosy and her younger brother Cilau share the mystical art and Wixárika culture in their travels around the world.



Cilau inherited his father's talent as a yarn artist and storyteller and now the two of them work together to weave the tales of the ancients and ancestors.



Cilau's visionary art transports the viewer through the looking glass, (the peyote cactus), to a psychedelic panorama beyond the imagination.



Mariano, 1993, age 40



Cilau, 2016 age 28

The new generation of Wixárika yarn artists, which Cilau is spearheading, propels their archetypal imagery to a new level of color and expression.

Votive Art 1940's



1960's



1980'S



2017



Yarn paintings are not a traditional art form, rather, they evolved out of votive offerings as a way for illiterate Wixárika artists to capture their visions and tell their creation stories to the world.



Cilau has initiated many young artists into his guild of yarn painters, which entails the completion of a spiritual path that connects them with the source of inspiration.



Wixárika creativity is felt to be mystical , and the threads of imagination seem to magically weave themselves into fine artwork.



Many hours are spent embedding the yarn into the sticky wax to form the images, and then fill in the shapes and backgrounds.



The challenge at hand is to insure that the Wixárika culture, and their highly evolved creativity, a fine gem on the crown of human enlightenment, continues to thrive and illuminate the world.

PART 3: THE HUICHOL CENTER'S GIFT TO POSTERITY



Safekeeping an Imperiled Legacy

WELCOME TO THE HUICHOL CENTER FOR CULTURAL SURVIVAL



Mariano and I inaugurated the first Huichol Center in 1980, a grassroots organization with the goal of “Transforming Field Hands into Creative Hands.” At that time the HC was located in Santiago Ixcuintla, Nayarit, a town known as “The Tobacco Capitol of Mexico”, where we provided direct assistance to families working in the fields.



Santiago Ixcuintla, Nayarit 1980-1993



Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco, 1993-present

For many decades the doors at the Huichol Center have been open, first in Santiago and now in Huejuquilla. It is a safe haven that provides much needed charitable services to Wixárika people who venture out into the world beyond the mountains.



Huichol Center visitors and participants consist of families from different regions of the Wixárika Nation. Within our walls the migrants find solutions to problems that threaten their personal and cultural survival, including refuge, assistance, medical care and a bowl of soup.



The talents of the artists were cultivated at the Huichol Center, as they left the tobacco fields to obtain training for jobs in the arts. New options emerged for families who could return home and create art for a living, which the HC purchased and marketed.



The artists were trained in a variety of art skills, and ascended to new heights of creativity. Their highly inspired beaded innovations, such as sculptures and masks, gave rise to a new genre of Huichol art, that continues to help families thrive.



The jaguars, representing the shamans spirit guides, are examples of the beaded artwork created by the HC artists who escaped the servitude of the tobacco fields.



To this day, the Huichol Center continues to empower women beadweavers with financial stability as economically self-sufficient providers for their families.



The artists take pride in knowing that the sale of their beautiful creations is a vital source of income for them, and for the Huichol Center, as our “Handcrafts, not Hand-outs” program is now in its 35th year.



The artwork created at the HC is showcased at Galeria Tanana, our marketing outlet in Sayulita, Nayarit, a tourist location near the famous beach town of Puerto Vallarta.



“Saving an Endangered Tribe, One Bracelet at a Time” is our new marketing slogan.

HUICHOL CENTER CULTURE RESCUE PROJECTS



The Huichol Center relocated to Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco, in 1993. Over the years it has evolved into an innovative, holistic and replicable model to bolster the odds for Wixárika cultural survival, and, can be applied to other endangered cultures as well. Our focus is on five major areas: documentation, education, economic self-sufficiency, conservation of traditions and lastly, food and water security.

THE HUICHOL CENTER ETHNOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE



Huichol Shamanic Healing Practices

<p>Fertility</p>	<p>Birth Control</p>
<p>Eagle Claw in Throat</p>	<p>Reptile Revenge</p>



This compendium of Wixárika esoteric knowledge is a vault of indigenous wisdom that has been safeguarded by the Huichol Center for the heirs of this precious legacy.

A series of conventionalized forms representing the *tôto'* is shown in Fig. 499. All are woven or embroidered except the last two. The next to the last design is in bead-work, and represents the flower in side view. A few of the motives at first sight appear strange. They represent the flower with two or four pistils. The dots on the petals, sometimes appearing as rectangles or squares, may symbolize stars (see Design No. 52). In other cases they are clearly repetitions of *tôto'*. A slight similarity to

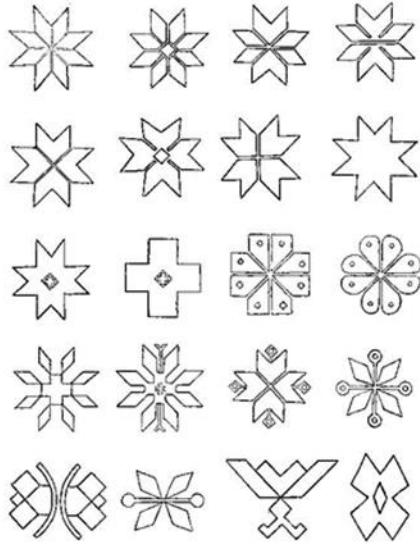
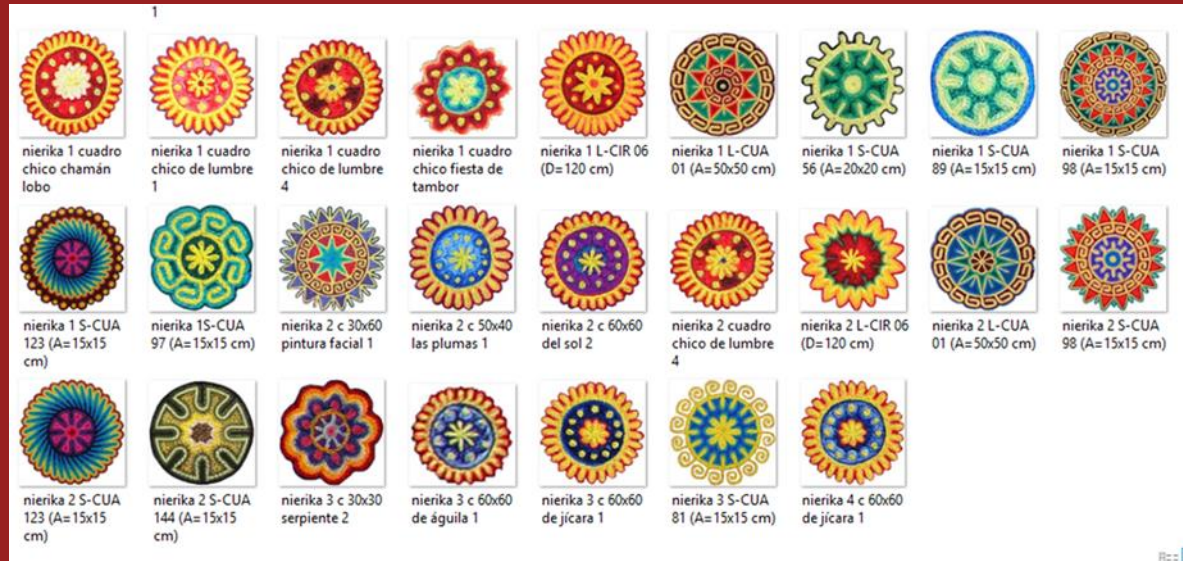


Fig. 499. Series of *tôto'* designs.

Oriental designs may suggest some foreign influence; on the other hand, flower designs are by their nature subject to limitations, so that a certain likeness between the productions of distant tribes and races must always be expected.

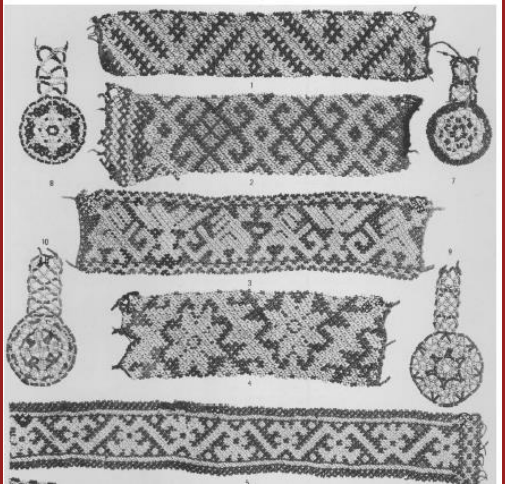
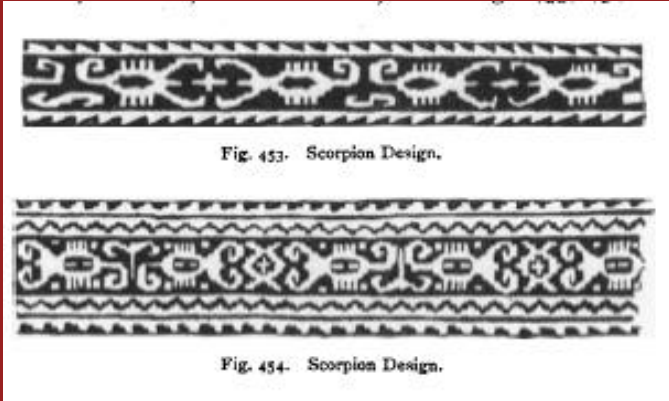
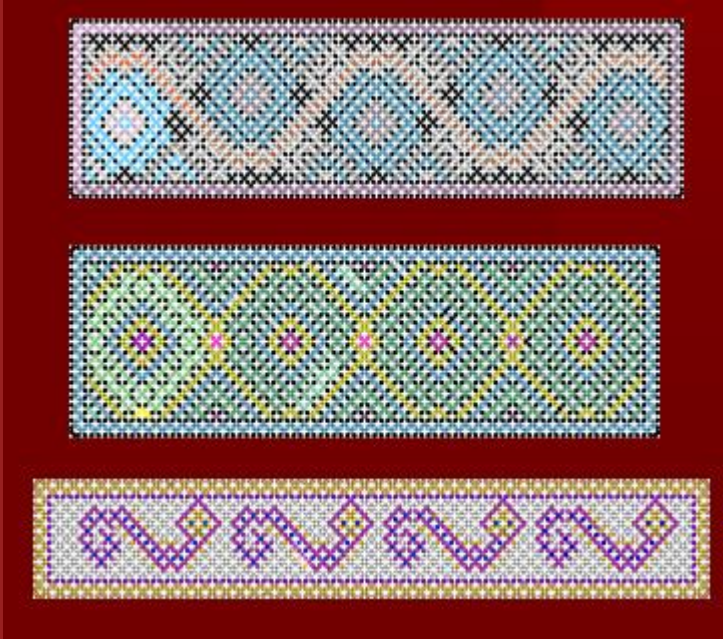
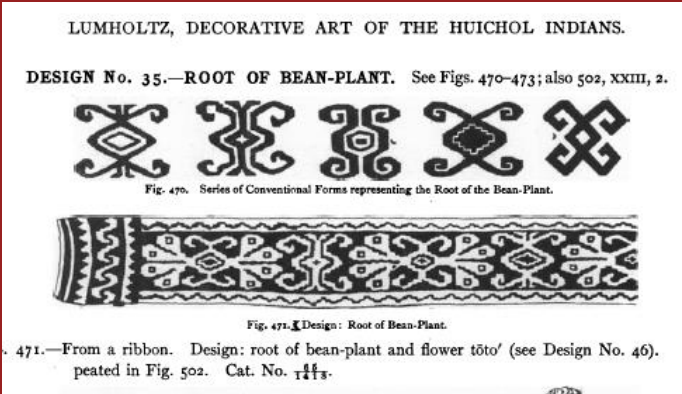
The extensive application of the *tôto'* design exhibits in a characteristic manner the tendency of the Huichol to give an interpretation to every pattern. The forms which accompany the flower design are often given interpretations which are incongruous to the explanation of a flower. Thus we find on an embroidered garment (Fig. 500) the flower *tôto'*, and on each petal the representation of a macaw. In this case the flower is, on the one hand, the decorative field into which the birds have been fitted,



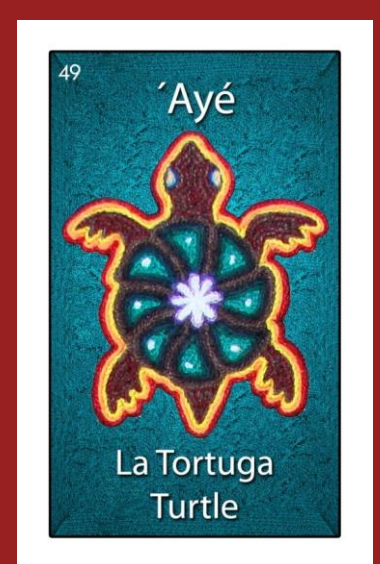
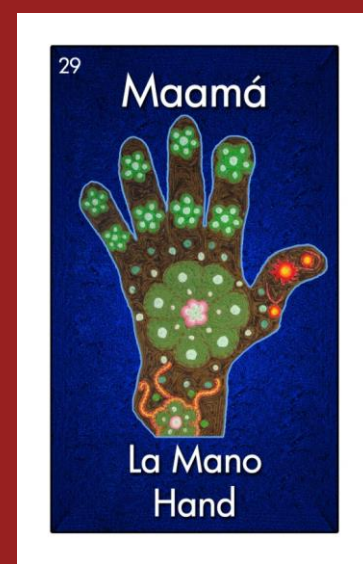
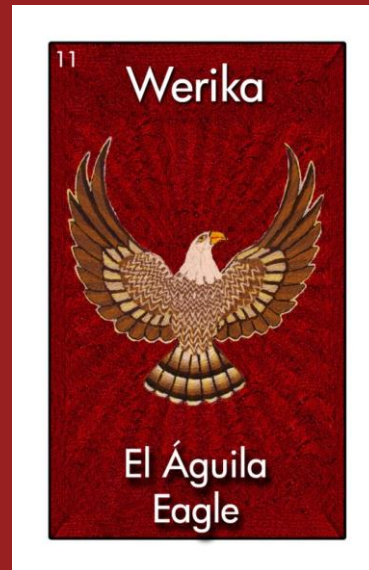
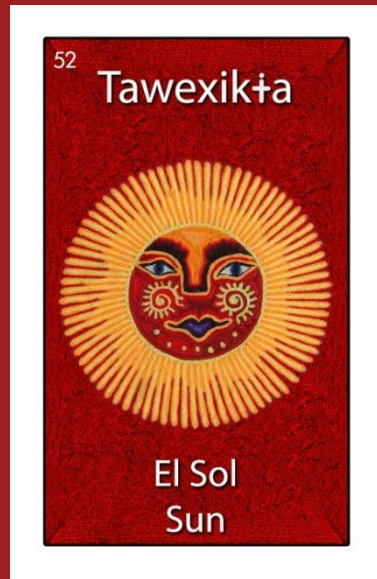
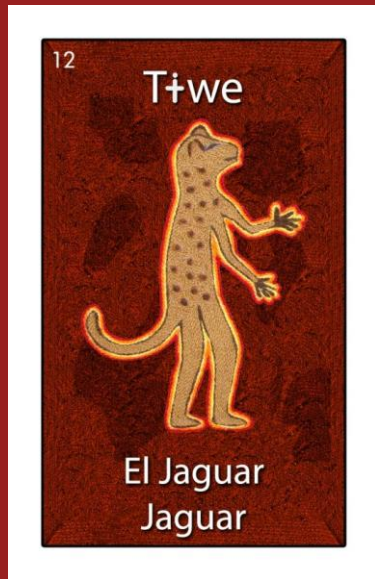
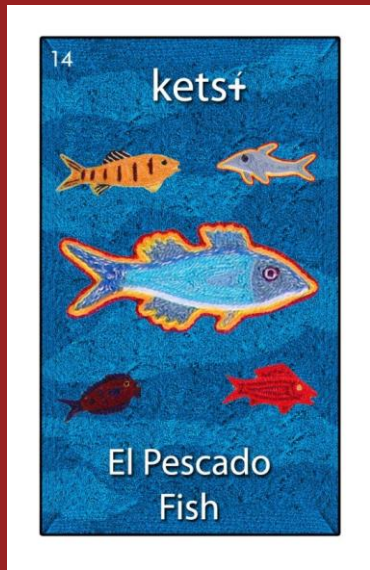
It is a repository of information pertaining to Wixárika cosmology, iconography, ethno-botany and spiritual traditions. Building upon what Carl Lumholtz documented, it now consists of thousands of items, including photos, drawings, videos, recordings, artwork and more.



The Design Archive I began in the 1970's to conserve their patterns for posterity has matured into an unparalleled heirloom of Wixarika art. This world treasure is a testimonial to the power of their various art forms to transform their deepest spiritual essence into boundless talent, color and expression. It is a tribute to the height of human creativity.



Carl Lumholtz recorded the patterns in black and white by hand, in 1898, but now we digitally record and safeguard them in color.



Safeguarding the language of symbols is a vital aspect of Wixárika cultural and artistic conservation. The visual language of Wixárika iconography is multi-layered, and well documented in the Huichol Center database.



Wixárika students of all ages have become computer savvy as they are taught to access our database of art and symbols. After years of practice, some of the older pupils have launched careers as graphic artists. These innovations have expanded the thresholds of Wixárika creativity. By taking advantage of 21st century technology, they have invented a new digital art form, the latest genre of Wixárika symbology.



At some point in the near future, the symbols may evolve into a visual vernacular of icons, that will become a part of the new, universal, cyber language lexicon. Some of the archetypal symbols that were seeded long ago into human consciousness are now germinating into the mainstream, and may soon form a part of the mother tongue of the cyber world.





As ancient Wixárika symbols intersect with modern technology, the intuitive artists will transform icons, generated from their peyote visions, onto our desktops. With the click of the mouse, or perhaps, with the wave of virtual reality magical feathers, the icons will provide access to portals of spiritual knowledge and creativity, all potentially vital to humanity's future on earth.

A STRATEGY FOR SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE TRADITIONS: EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT FOR WIXARIKA CHILDREN



The Huichol Center's Blue Corn Mother School is a non-governmental project that I founded in 1998. Its goal is to cultivate an awareness in the Wixárika children about how special they are to be the caretakers of such a beautiful language and legacy, and how they can protect it.



Approximately 40-50 children (ages of 5-14) attend the school, which is open to children living in Huejuquilla or passing through town. They are taught in their native dialect to read, write, count, make music, re-enact myths, create art, prepare traditional foods and participate in ceremonies.

Centro Indígena Huichol A.C.

Nenekate Wa +kiya Witak+: Wixaritari Wa Kiekari

Ti Hetsiememe

Wewiyate

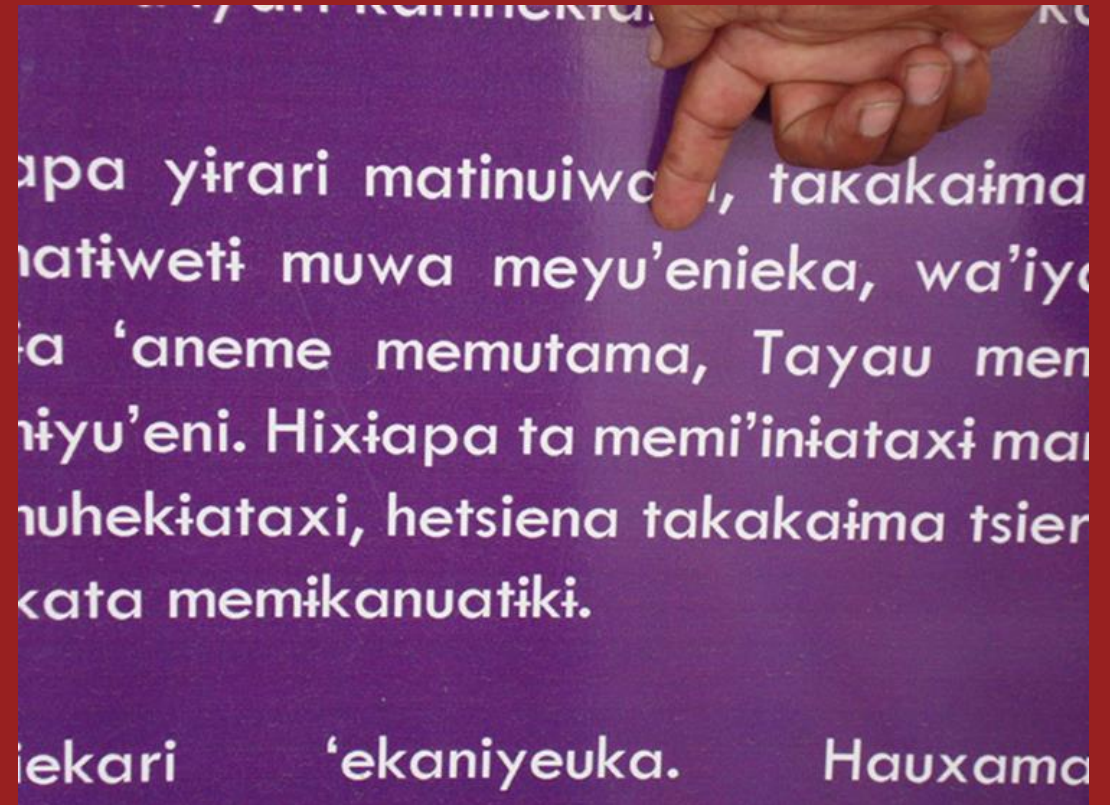
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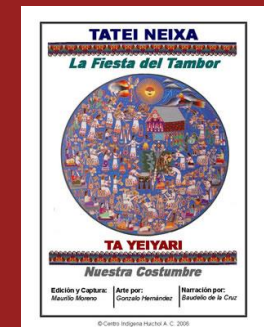
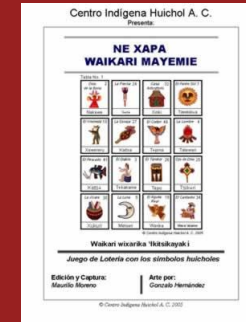
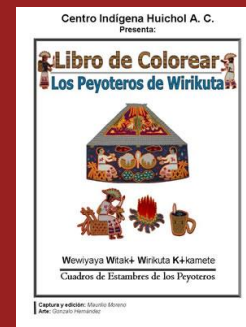
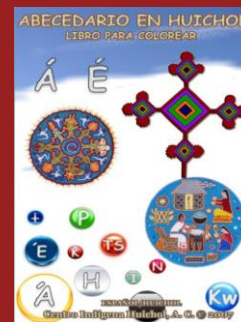
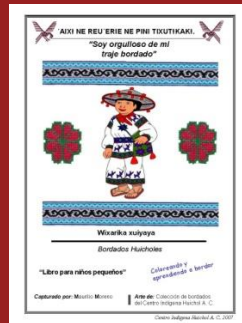
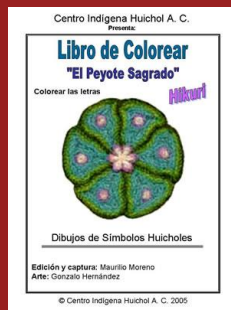
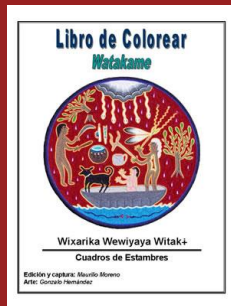
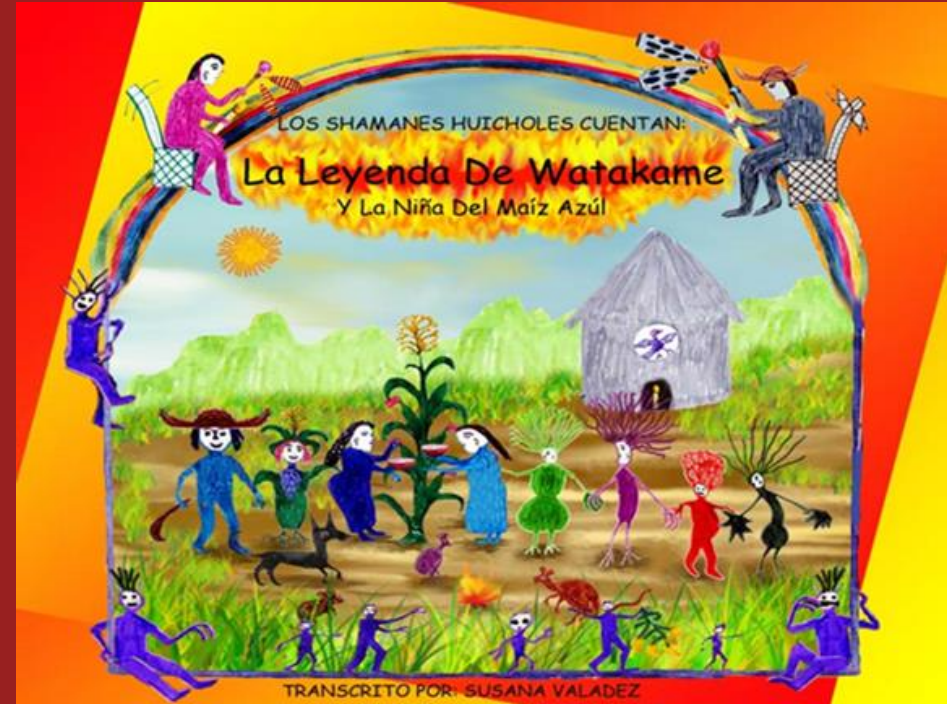
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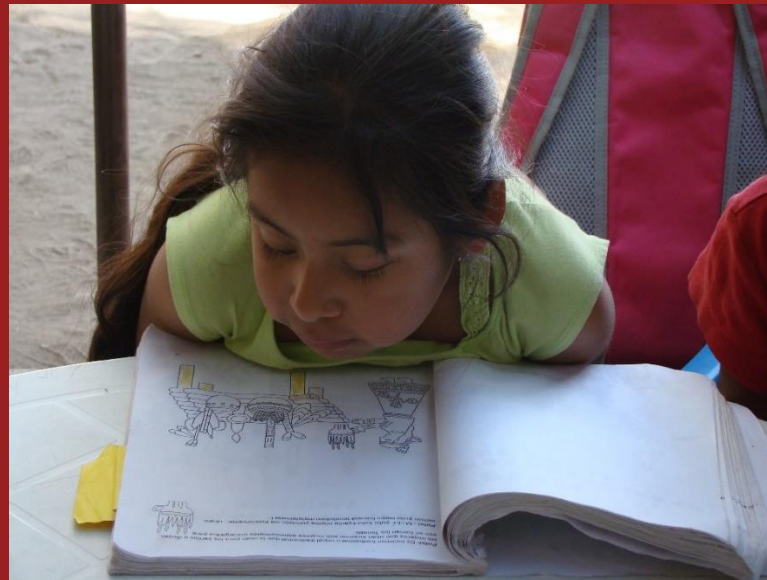
Tatei Haituima witari yusiyari, meta haiwi manyaw+. Ta heima makawe naukametsie, yuniuki manakan+awa naitserie mimierikak. Xukuri ma + ha yurime áyamakame, mana muka úxipiwe haiwi taxarik+, manati éke witarita. M+k+ h+k+ xewit+ meyuwa+kawa mexuawe yusiri witari memeyan+awa kepauka Wixaritari naime meterakan+tsiriwa. Tatei Haituima ti úximaya, Tatei íku mat+a, Takutsi Nakawe, Ta Yau Tata hipameri, m+k+ yunait+ metehyen+ áwa tiwa+kawa meta teuteri wa tukari.



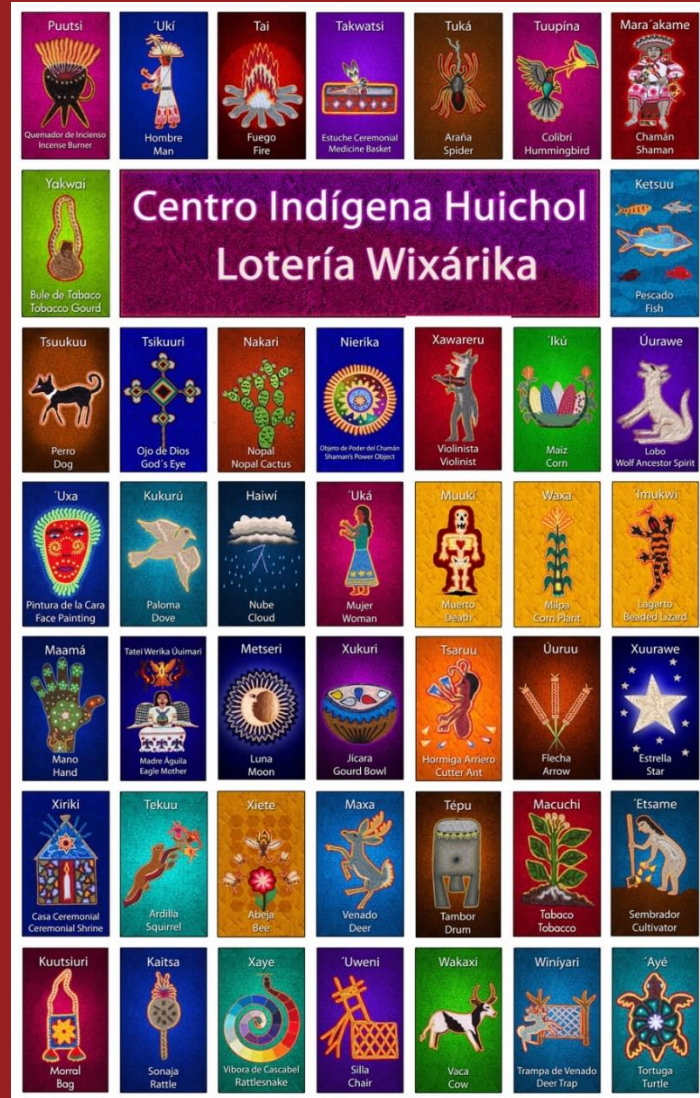
As the modern world overtakes so many aspects of Wixárika traditional life, their native Uto-Aztecan dialect is disappearing as the elders die off and people migrate into the dominant society. A huge priority of the Blue Corn Mother School is to protect against language loss, by creating innovative ways to inspire the parents and children to speak and read it.



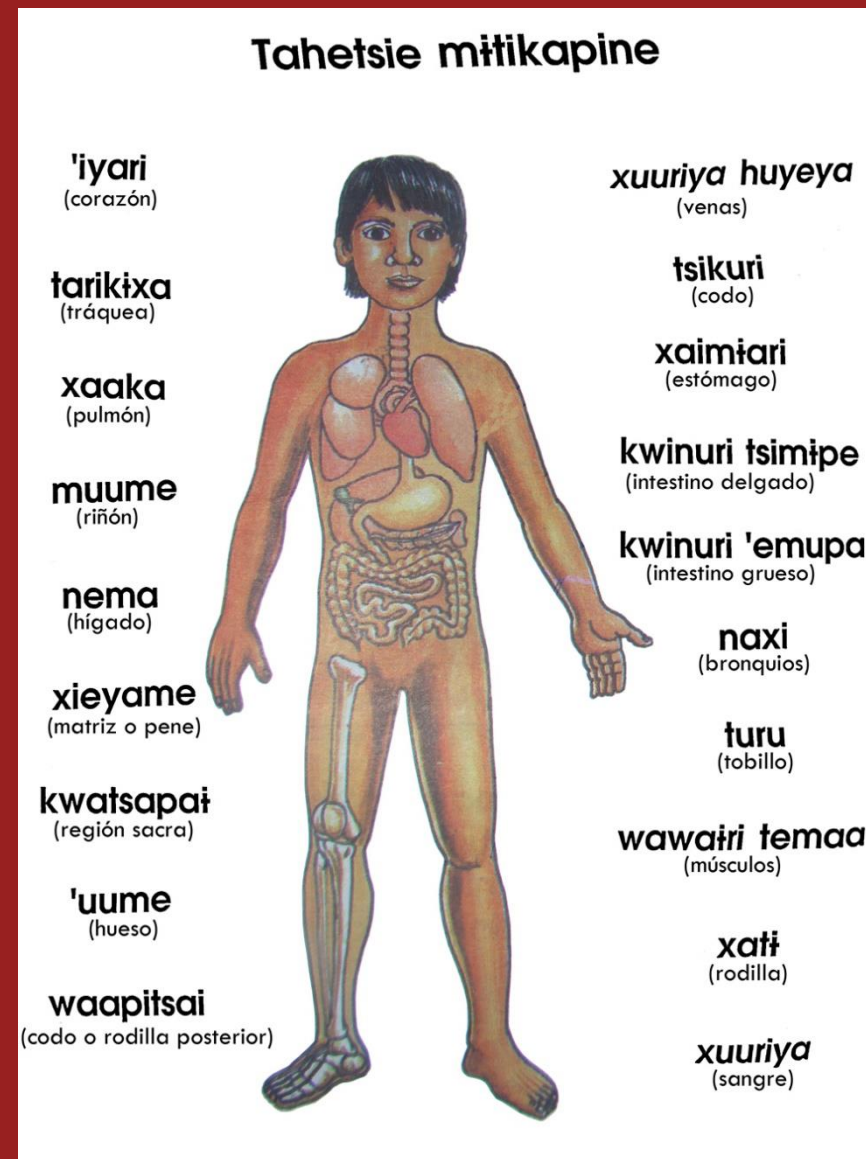
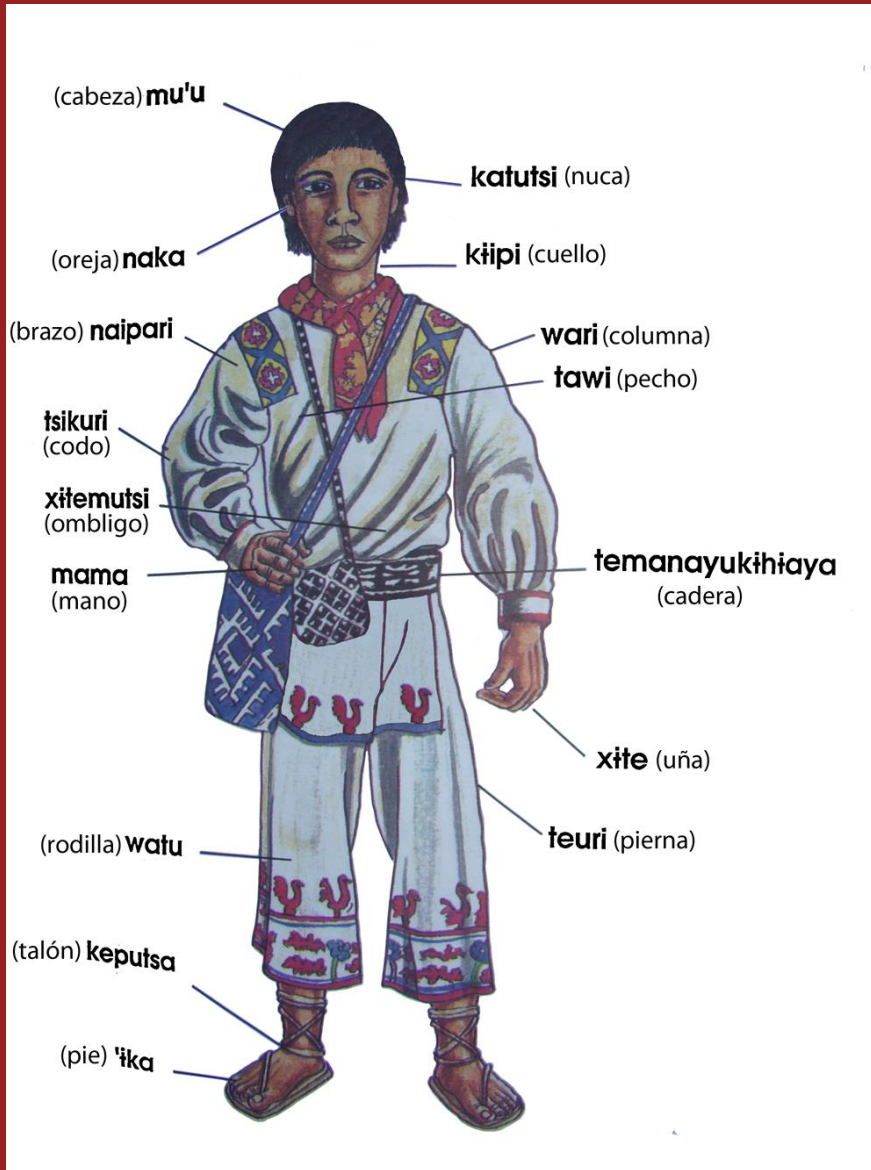
The Wixáríka language has only been a written language since the 1960s. Due to the scarcity of scholastic material in the native dialect, the Huichol Center creates a bilingual curriculum for use in the school.



Under the guidance of story-telling shamans, a culturally relevant curriculum is created to record oral traditions and reinforce the children's knowledge of their myths, history and spirituality.



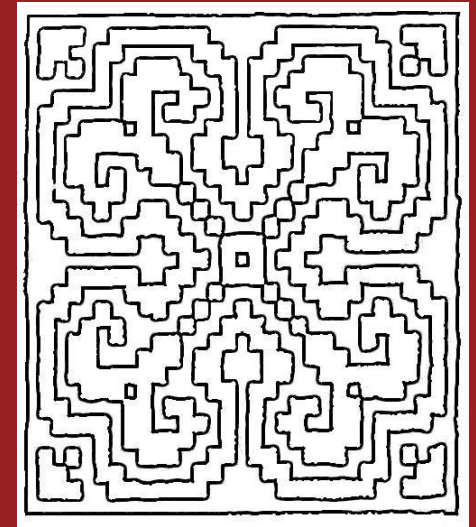
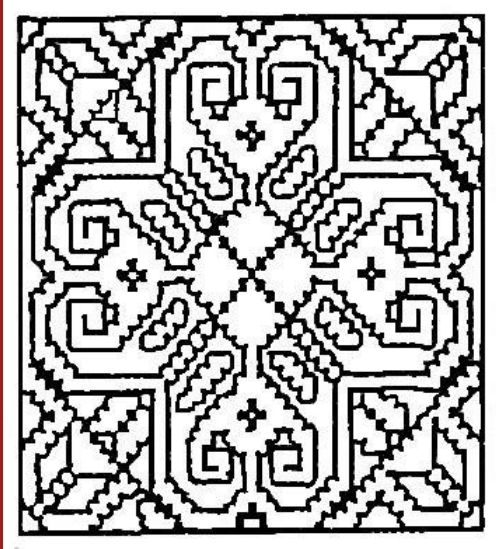
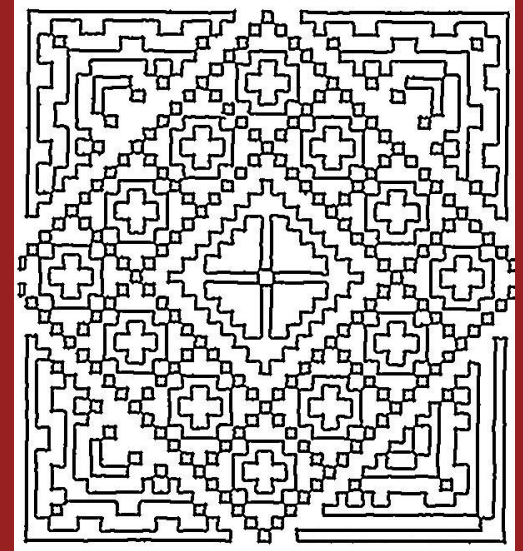
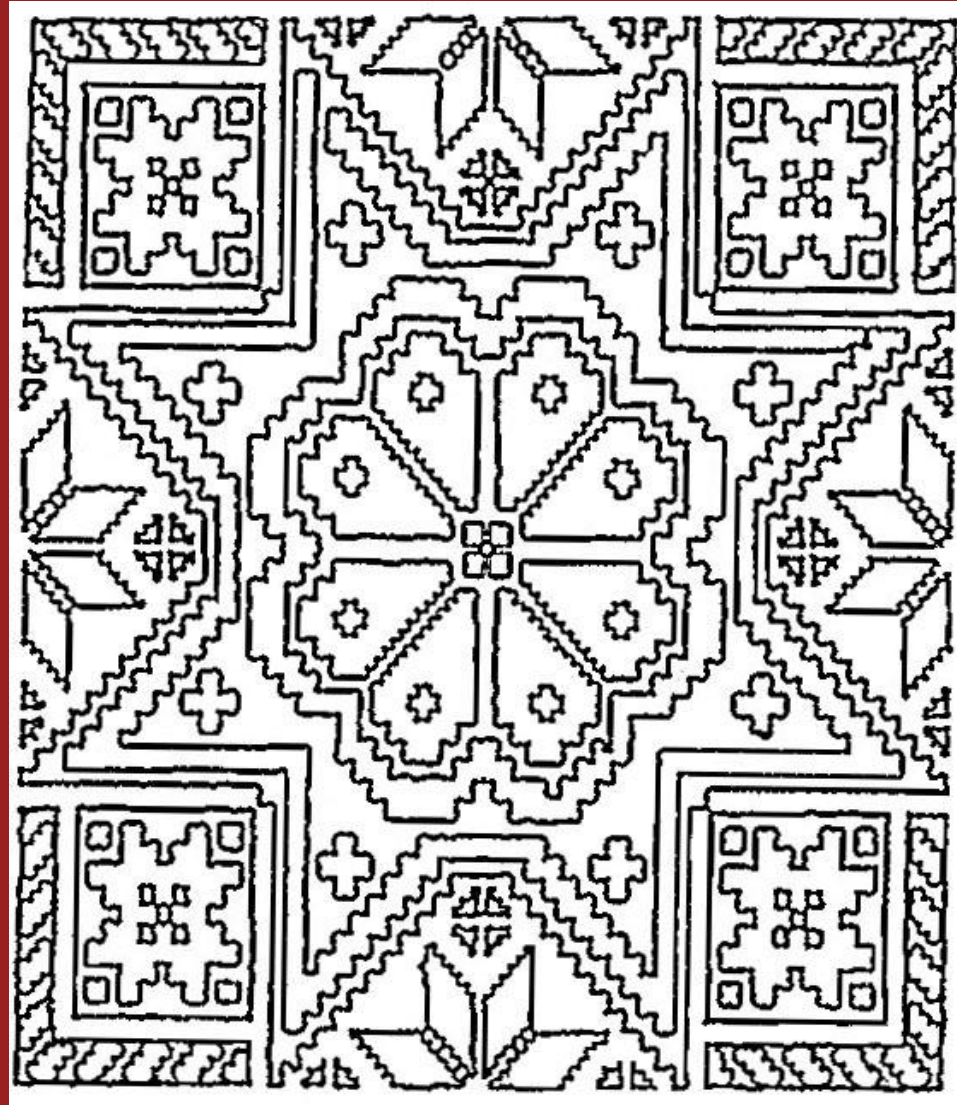
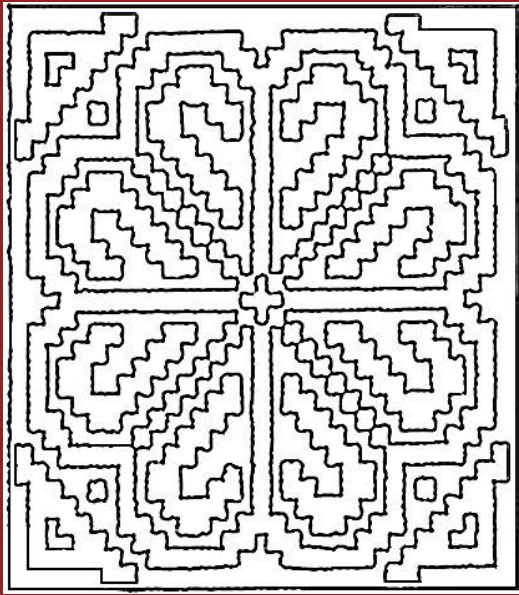
We created a wide variety of Wixárika/ Spanish language games, activity books, symbolism lessons and folktales, to ingrain the students every day with a sense of awe and pride in their core culture.



Wixárika language graphics fill the walls of the school, surrounding the children with constant reminders that their words carry special levels of meanings, intelligible only to them.



The language of symbols is taught through the use of coloring activities that bring creation stories and traditions to life. The Huichol Center design repository consists of hundreds of symbols from the yarn paintings that have been digitally converted into line drawings to make coloring pages.



Many traditional embroidery patterns from the Huichol Center Design Archive have also been converted into line drawings for the students to color.



The children develop deep connections to one another, and to the Huichol Center community, where their sense of belonging empowers them to take pride in who they are.



The students enthusiastically recreate the sacred designs, in activities that stimulate their innate creative essence. As they grow older they blossom into master artists who draw upon the heart memories that were seeded in their early school days.



The light of creativity shines bright in the faces of the children who are reminded every day of their birthright as guardians of the sacred symbols and knowledge.



Attuning the children to the sacred ancestral vibrations through drumming, dance and traditional music, reinforces the major role music plays in their Wixárika heritage.



Many scholastic activities are practiced at the school to remind the children that even though their culture has evolved since many generations ago, they still live among people who remember and practice the old ways. The children are encouraged to re-enact their traditions through role playing.



Authenticity is etched into each child's heart-memory through activities that awaken their true selves. The Corn Maidens and Deer Boy are culture heroes in Wixárika mythology, who, through role playing, become spiritual mentors to the children during their formative years.



The school is a melting pot of happy kids harmoniously coexisting within our walls. Children from different Wixárika regions form long lasting friendships, which later on helps to ease tensions between some of the communities that are divided by land disputes.



The school invigorates the children, and strengthens their resolve to reclaim, and value, the spirit and substance of their collective past, present and future identity.



Equipping Wixárika children with the love of their culture as a part of the educational process makes it much more likely that they will return to their homeland in the future, after college, as leaders and professionals who can contribute to the safekeeping of their language, art and vast cultural legacy.



It all hangs in the balance with this current generation of Wixárika youth, who will determine the future fate of their “ancient tribe in the modern world!”. The babies who have grown up under our wing are empowered with the knowledge that the future of their world, and perhaps the world at large, greatly depends on their on-going commitment to their stewardship of their traditions.

THE HUICHOL CENTER'S PROGRAMS FOR FOOD AND WATER SECURITY



The children's minds and bodies are nourished at the school, with plenty of food for thought, in addition to healthy meals, from farm to table, to strengthen their immune systems.



Children are provided with activities that teach them how to prepare their traditional foods.



Every effort is made to utilize water in the most respectful and efficient ways.



Rain water is harvested and used to grow fish and vegetables.



At the Huichol Center, we attempt to eliminate hunger by “teaching the hungry people to fish”, literally. The fish tanks are seeded with tilapia which grow to full size in four months.



The fish water is cycled into the vegetables and provides nutrients for the plants.



The school is located on one of the HC's permaculture sites, a learning environment that reaffirms their age old relationships of reciprocity between people and nature. Teaching the children to take part in the production of food they eat teaches them valuable survival skills needed to eliminate hunger, whether living in the mountains or in urban areas.



The children are participant/observers of all of the eco-technologies practiced at this learning center, such as water conservation, organic gardening, tree planting, seed banking, composting, soil rebuilding, fish farming, raising animals and more.



Practice of small scale farming at the HC provides valuable survival skills that empowers the children to remember, practice, retain and build upon the level of self-sufficiency that sustained their agrarian ancestors for centuries.



Hands-on activities seed the soil, and their minds, as the children learn sustainable agriculture skills and the use of renewable resources.



Seeding the earth rekindles their sacred partnership with nature, and revitalizes their connections to their spiritual core.



These are the Huichol Center's newest crops!



Seed banking insures that the ancient seed lineages are protected and preserved.



Authentic, non-GMO original seeds are safeguarded like precious gems.



Our efforts are directed at teaching them to once again provide for themselves, so that hopefully hunger in their communities becomes a thing of the past.



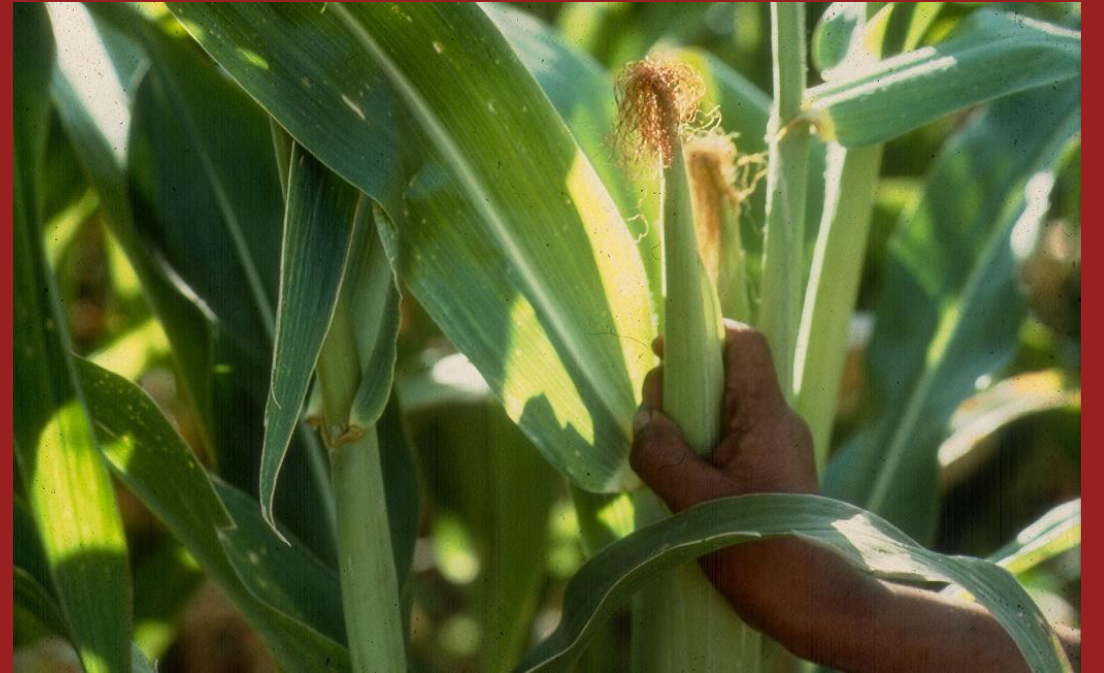
Our fields are planted with blue corn and other Wixárika crops every year.



Just like the olden days, we plough the fields with mules to make them ready to sow the seed.



Our prayers and offerings that were left in the fields for abundant harvests are answered.



The corn children burst forth, to the joy of all.



The time is now for all of humanity to work collectively to fine tune the relationships of reciprocity between humans, nature and technology. To accomplish this, we must reshape human consciousness with a paradigm shift that will bolster the odds for the future of all earth's inhabitants and landscapes.



Indigenous wisdom restores our balance with the natural order and guides the way to global enlightenment. It holds the seeds to humanity's florescence.



Guadalajara, Jalisco 1975



Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco 2017

I am thankful to be a bridge, a conduit for sharing the Wixarika message, wisdom and beauty with the world. While much has been accomplished, there still remains much more to be done.



Susana in 1975



Susana in 2017

It has been my greatest honor to be of service to humanity with my lifelong commitment to reviving and strengthening Mexico's Wixárika culture, knowledge, spirituality and art. The safeguarding of their living traditions, and strategies to make sure they endure, has positively impacted their lives, my life and countless many others.