

Marginal Men: Male Artists Among the Shipibo Indians of Peru

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RÉSUMÉ

Les artistes masculins sont très rares parmi les Indiens Shipibos de la jungle du Pérou parce que leur société alloue les tâches technologiques aux hommes et les fonctions artistiques aux femmes. Cependant l'apparition d'un certain tourisme a encouragé quelques hommes marginaux à transgresser la division sexuelle du travail. Néanmoins, ils produisent un art plus orthodoxe que les femmes à cause de leur dépendance exclusive d'un marché externe. La marginalité est liée à l'art seulement chez les quelques femmes qui ont révolutionné le style artistique. Les hommes marginaux doivent utiliser leur créativité dans leurs rôles peu orthodoxes et non pas dans leur art.

This paper describes the anomalous position of male Shipibo Indian artists of the Peruvian jungle. In this society the production of art is theoretically the exclusive domain of women. Since they use it to decorate various craft objects such as pottery, woodcarving and textiles, most women are merely fulfilling a conventional role and therefore exhibit little of the marked social deviance which ideally characterizes many artists in the modern world. However, women who have revolutionized the native style as well as rare male artists do exhibit such traits. Tourist art is an area of "protected deviation" where men may trespass an otherwise strict sexual division of labor. It is also a sphere which limits their impact on the internal expression of the art. Unlike the deviant women, the men are forced to limit their innovation to the manipulation of their social role since the art they produce is very orthodox. Because of their dependence on the tourist market, male artists also engage in more stereotyped aesthetic production.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SHIPIBO

The Shipibo are a populous tribe of Panoan-speaking Indians located on the Middle Ucayali, a major southern tributary of the Amazon which meanders north along the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Andes. This region is called the *montaña*. Shipibo are "canoe Indians" who travel great distances in dugout canoes rather than traverse even short distances overland. They dislike the jungle and are not terribly familiar with it. The Shipibo live along the banks of the rivers and lakes, fishing and cultivating gardens of plantains and manioc.

Although in missionary contact since the 16th century, the Shipibo, and the closely-related and intermarrying Conibo to the south, regularly "harvested" their backwoods, or interfluvial, Panoan and Arawakan neighbors for wives and slaves until the 1940s. Today, the Shipibo range from acculturated groups near the major regional center of Pucallpa at the terminus of the trans-Andean highway, to only moderately acculturated groups living downriver on the Ucayali. In all cases, the language of internal communication is Shipibo, ethnoc endogamy is the rule, and women dress in "native" costume and engage in traditional arts and crafts. Shipibo men, particularly near Pucallpa, have largely discarded the traditional *cushma* and dress in cotton shirts and trousers. Often only the custom of fronto-occipital head deformation distinguishes them in appearance from rural mestizos. Shipibo men may supplement their subsistence activities with cash labor while the women sell traditional crafts to the tourists.

As a central mark of their distinction, the Shipibo retain, and are continuing to elaborate, one of the most complex functioning art styles in the aboriginal New World today. It is an intricate geometric style executed in many diverse media from pottery and textiles to face-painting, beadwork and woodcarving.

THE HISTORY OF THE STYLE

The history of Shipibo-Conibo art is shrouded in mystery. The basic design layout of the backwoods Panoans, a zig-zag, or, transversely reflected, a diamond pattern (Roe, ms. 1), may derive from the 8th cen. A.D. Cumancaya Tradition (Raymond, DeBoer

and Roe 1975). The elaborate Shipibo-Conibo style of the main river, however, seems to have a separate origin in missionary contacts which the riverine Panoans have experienced since the 16th century, and in the elaborate but dissimilar Cocama / Cocamilla style (Lathrap 1970, Figures 69, 70) of their Tupi-speaking competitors for a new alluvial niche on the Ucayali. The two tribes were resettled next to each other in missionary created villages late in the contact period (Myers 1974: 153). The central cross-like element in Shipibo art is called *caros* in Shipibo and, as DeBoer (ms.) has pointed out, it is almost certainly cognate with and derived from the Spanish word for cross, *cruz*. Although this motif has no specific Christian meaning for modern Shipibo, the cross may well have been originally a Christian loan. As early as 1686, the Conibo were described as having painted shirts (Izaquirre 1922-29, I: 309), although the nature of the designs was not recorded. The "shirts" undoubtedly referred to the traditional *tari*, or *cushma* as it is regionally called, a sleeveless untailored cotton poncho. The first Setebo, or Shretebo (an extinct northern group closely related to the Shipibo) missions were in 1657 and 1661. When, after intervening smallpox epidemics and revolts, renewed missionary efforts began in 1754 the Setebo retained elements of Christianity. Despite a hiatus of 80 years they had crosses everywhere and were baptizing babies with Lemon juice (Steward and Métraux 1948: 559). That the cross as a geometric form so interested their ancestors that it could persist as one of the few remnants of culture contact may argue for its later importance in Shipibo-Conibo art.

F.L. Galt traveled through the Ucayali on a Hydrographic Commission expedition in 1870 and mentioned face and body painting in a way that indicates the persistence of the design system. "Another Conibo in the boat was the most fantastically painted devil I've seen yet; large, irregular patches of 'Huito' (*Genipa americana*) neatly though curiously wrought out on his arms and legs, and the same taking the place of beard on his face" (Galt, ms.: 72, Typescript: 289). Ensign W.E. Safford, who traversed the Ucayali in 1891 collecting specimens for the World Columbia Exposition of Chicago in 1893, took photographs which are our first definitive evidence of the existence of the art style in the form of face-painting of Shipibo men (ms. II: 20). They also portray Conibo men with glass bead chokers in completely modern style (*Ibid.*: II: 19). Furthermore, in some photographs of Conibo at the headwaters of the Ucayali, their complex painted polychrome pottery is depicted in

the foreground with its version of the characteristic art style. Despite all that has happened in the intervening time, it is remarkable how little the designs have changed from these early pictures.

The reason why no painted or woven-decorated *tari* are shown or mentioned by Galt or Safford may have something to do with the less cleanly habits of the Shipibo-Conibo in those demoralized days (the *patron* system then being in operation) than at present, a fact which Galt dilated upon at interminable length. The *tari* is a work of art. It is sparkling white when new. On this white background the black painted designs and colored warp-patterned woven panels are added as vertical design fields. As the *tari* ages and becomes soiled the whole garment is dyed with a hematite-rich mud dye which turns it light brown, the patterns just barely being visible in black. After repeated dyeings, the *tari* turns a smoky brownish-black and all trace of the designs disappears. Apparently, either by chance or more slovenly behavior than currently, all the Shipibo-Conibo men whom Galt saw and described and Safford photographed appeared in the brown and seemingly undecorated cushmas.

Safford pictured (*Ibid.*: I: 5) a single Piro man, a member of a tribe on intermittently hostile relations with the Conibo. He wears a new cushma with elaborate designs. This is ironic because Farabee (1922: 56) claimed that the Piro got all their fine pottery ware from the Conibo. That ware is covered with the intricate designs of the Conibo style and thus they learned this style from the Conibo. The "learners" in these ethnographic photographs were represented in more resplendent costumes than their "teachers". The Piro style, as one particularly elaborate cushma Safford sent back to the Smithsonian (cat. no. 164689) indicates, was very close to Conibo art. Indeed, it is considerably more elaborate than recent Piro examples (Alvarez 1970).

In 1899 and 1917 Farabee collected a representative sample of Shipibo-Conibo material culture for the University Museum in Philadelphia. The decorations on objects in this collection are fully modern in style (Farabee 1915: 95, 98, 1917: 78), displaying the characteristic Conibo preference for fat form lines and ultra-thin secondary and tertiary work. Within that Conibo subvariant of the painted style, which was earlier predominant, the most important development occurred around 1957 when a famous potter, Wasëmëa (Lathrap 1976: 203), innovated the curvilinear, or *mayaquënëa*, style.

This supplemented the older rectilinear, or *pöntiquënëa*, style. Within the confines of the Shipibo-Conibo style, that innovation had a revolutionary impact.

The closely related Shipibo live to the north, from the mouth of the Pachitea to Sarayacu. They use a slightly busier style of decoration. A more baroque (in the Wöfflerian sense) effect is produced by reducing the width ratio between the form lines and the secondary and tertiary work so that both more nearly approximate the same size. Most recently, the Shipibo substyle, in the hands of accomplished artists like Casimira (Lathrap 1976: 200, Roe, ms. 2), has begun to assume pride of place. The latest Shipibo innovation occurred on embroidered skirts, or *chitonte*, of the *šhoque shëta*, or "toucan's beak" style. This mode, which was all the rage among young women in 1972 and 1973, carried the baroque tendencies of the tradition forward through its bold manipulation of color. It does this by experimenting with the "op-art" qualities of bright aniline dyes upon white, rather than the traditionally dark brown, dress material. Greater attention is also called to the filler motifs rather than the form lines, again partially by the use of contrasting color.

Downriver, to the north, the Pisquibo (a geographical subdivision of the Shipibo inhabiting the Rio Pisqui, a tributary of the Ucayali) have retained a more conservative substyle. Their work is a simplified and bolder art (Lathrap 1976: 206). Collections I studied lacked *mayaquënëa* decorations completely and differed in other traits as well. The Setebo further to the north once produced art in this tradition, but this group is now extinct.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STYLE

Figure 1 shows a normal Shipibo design based on the contrast between thick and thin lines. It was painted on cloth, using a short small bamboo lath, or *shëpan*, with organic dyes. To paint pottery a small human-hair brush is used with ochreous slip-paints. In either medium, the general term for the decorative patterns is *quënëa*. The Shipibo have a detailed vocabulary to discuss this style. The *quënëa* are first delineated with thick, broad lines, or *peshtin*, before the fine lines, or *wirish*, are drawn paralleling the form lines on either side. When they function as a border the fine lines are called *quëtana* and have the effect of greatly increasing the complexity of design while

employing only the same rule of parallelism. Lastly, fine filler motifs are placed within the thick form lines. In contrast to the rigidly patterned skeleton of form lines, these filler motifs, or *beshëcan sharan quëñëa*, are placed semi-randomly (*Ibid.*: 1976: 203).

This style is used in a whole range of media, with slight modifications adapted to the properties of each medium. The severest limitations occur in warp-patterned woven textiles (see Rowe 1977: 74, fig. 74) where the warp and weft constrain the style to a rectilinear/diagonal mode and the weaver only uses form lines. Equally severe constraints occur in the diagonal beading technique

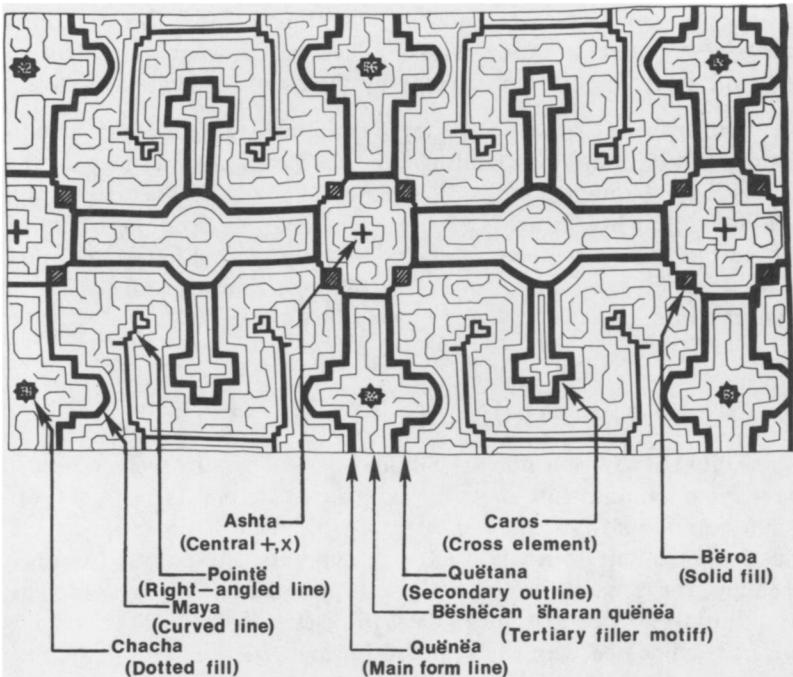


FIGURE 1: *Keyed Shipibo Mayaquëñëa Design*

used by the Shipibo-Conibo (see Plate I). Face and body painting, textile and ceramic painting and embroidery are relatively free of such limitations and there the style elements are fully used. Woodcarving, on the other hand, presents a number of difficulties. The increased effort of carving across the grain in the curved *mayaquënëa* designs causes woodcarvers to prefer the easier rectilinear designs. Secondly, due to the "incision" quality of the carving, only one modal width of line characterizes woodwork. Thus, designs tend to be limited to the basic form lines and are relatively easy to understand.



PLATE I: A Portrait of José

Since we will be concerned with men's art here it is woodcarving that we will principally study. However, in all media the formal rules of the style override material constraints because the designs recognizably belong together. The most important compositional rule is the principle of "infinite design field truncation" whereby the design is conceived to extend infinitely in two dimensions until a portion of the field is "laid over" the item to be decorated. Where the two coincide, the field remains, where they do not the excess is abruptly truncated. Thus a border is formed, particularly on flat objects whose surfaces are most amenable to such treatment. On round vessels, the human face or body parts, greater accommodation of the design to the properties of the field occurs. But some attempt is made to preserve the implicit infinity of design.

THE LEVEL OF MEANING

Despite assertions by other investigators (Anderson, n.d., Girard 1958: 240) which read cosmic implications into the cross or interpret the segmented lines as serpents, I was never able to get Shipibo to volunteer any iconographic identifications for motifs. When I suggested mythic references, such as "that looks like a spider to me", I was greeted by gales of laughter. Later it became clear to me that I had transgressed an important rule of Shipibo etiquette by even asking such a question. Indeed, ignorance of that rule on the part of others, coupled with the short amount of time they have worked among the Shipibo, could easily account for the divergent attributions of meaning in the literature. The Shipibo value modesty in their artists. The rule is, no artist says anything positive about her work, or even discusses it in a manner to appear to unduly emphasize it. Similarly, although women are free about their opinions of another woman's work to a third party, they would never venture an opinion about the content of the design in her presence. By so doing the implication is that the critic "knows more about a woman's art than the woman herself", a grave insult. Thus one can see how an erroneous identification, itself an uncouth act, is readily agreed to by an embarrassed artist or audience in the hope that it will satisfy the questioner and keep him from going further. All my attempts to ask other women about the meaning of a woman's designs in private proved fruitless. Thus I am confident there is no meaning.

Shipibo designs are therefore essentially surface embellishment. The interpretations of them by outsiders are based on what Bunzel (1929: 71) called "a marked tendency to clothe designs with significance of a purely subjective character" through a process of "reading in" (Boas 1927: 127). Thus the observer guesses about meaning based on analogous forms. This need to believe that designs must always mean something is apparently very strong since it is invariably the first question asked of me when I show someone Shipibo art. Shipibo designs today do signify social identity (Roe 1977: 82). They say "I am a Shipibo *Indian*" to those who wear and see them. The Indians use the style as a central prop to their ethnic identity, an identity under seige in the modernizing selva. This central social fact goes a long way to explaining the endurance of the art style in the face of acculturative pressures and its integrity when scratched into metal spoons (Roberta Campos, personal communication, 1975, for the Pisquibo) or painted with magic markers on nylon windbreakers.

Other meaning in Shipibo-Conibo art is absent, and Farabee was correct in 1915 when he wrote (1915: 95, 97) "The various designs used in the decoration must have had some symbolic significance in the beginning, but at present no one seems to know the symbolism. They say they have always used these forms but don't know why".

THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR IN ART

As in most South American Tropical Forest societies, there is a very strong sexual division of labor among the Shipibo. Men fish and hunt, work in wood and manipulate, in modern times, the machines the Western world has introduced. Women cook, engage in domestic crafts such as basketry, textiles and pottery, and rear children. The production of graphic art is exclusively the province of females. Verbal art, songs and dance can be engaged in by either sex. In a small face-to-face society, this dichotomy is strictly maintained by the power of ridicule. DeBoer (ms.: 12) has shown how this sexual division of labor in art has its roots in the ontogeny of the style:

Before age group IV (10-11 yrs. old)... there are no major differences between the designs of females and males. In one common game (*mashé quëñëa*), boys and girls make finger-drawings in the dirt plaza which flanks all Shipibo houses.

Although girls are more likely to draw *quënëa*, young boys also occasionally draw the designs. After about age 10, however, boys discovered drawing *quënëa* are visibly embarrassed. The designs drawn by boys and girls of age group IV begin to show major differences. These differences are not so much in the repertoire of elements or rules as they are in execution or 'skill'. When asked to draw *quënëa*, adult males and those of age group V (12-16 yrs. old) do so reluctantly and obviously attempt to misrepresent the design style.

One should add that adults and boys of the last age group readily draw modern objects such as cars and helicopters. Thus, it is not drawing they object to, but drawing traditional designs associated with women. Modern machines fit the native definition of a man's role as technologist. No Shipibo male would be caught dead manipulating a backstrap loom which women use to weave cloth. Yet they happily toil away attempting to repair or use the mainland Chinese copies of old Singer treadle-operated sewing machines, which wealthier households own in the more acculturated villages.

This division of labor binds the sexes together economically (Siskind 1973) while at the same time institutionalizing sexual antagonism (Murphy and Murphy 1974). The place of women in Shipibo society is much higher than the norm of other lowland societies, meriting the use of the archaic term "matriarchal". The traditional extended family unit of the Shipibo has been called matrilineal "with some clan features" (Steward and Metraux 1948: 556), and the current residence pattern takes the form of matrilocal compounds of separate houses around a cleared plaza (Roe, ms. 2). Women clearly have great influence in Shipibo society. They play a barely-disguised role in political decision-making, and their almost "leonine" presence and bearing are unmistakable. The social prominence of women has firm roots in their economic power. Thanks to a virtual monopoly of the arts and crafts which tourists prize, women often gain relatively large amounts of cash. Men, on the other hand, are reduced to carving toy bow and arrow, and lance sets which they decorate with colored string and feathers. Their original province was the full-sized versions of such items of hunting and fishing technology. Because of their relatively unelaborated "instrumental form" (Maquet 1971: 8) — the Shipibo never had elaborate war arrows like the neighboring Cashibo — these items are less in demand and fetch lower prices from the tourists than the beadwork, textiles or pottery of the women. Additionally, the items produced by men tend to be of large size, such as *makanas*, or *huinó* in Shipibo, wooden sword-

clubs and canoe paddles, *huinti*. They are large and inconveniently shaped to be carried by tourists so miniature versions of them must be made as has happened elsewhere (Graburn 1976: 15). Even in this demand for miniaturization, the art of the women seems more suitable. They also have the monopoly on the unbreakable, another tourist imperative, in the form of beadwork and textiles. Thus, women often derive more from the tourist trade than do men, whose efforts are usually looked upon as supplemental, rather than primary, in the family economic plan. I have seen households where the man was penniless and on the dole of his wife.

Men have to depend on seasonal, unstable or highly unpleasant sources of cash, such as swidden-plot clearing or lumbering (Campos 1977: 67). Women's work is, in contrast, steadier and a great deal more enjoyable. In addition, men's work is threatened by change whereas women's work is more enduring. Thus the men's role in agricultural wage labor has largely been replaced by mestizo competition in areas of dense settlement (Hoffman 1964: 274), but mestizo women have nothing to replace the art of Shipibo women, and indeed are customers for the latter's fine ware pottery. Because of their continued use of bow and arrow fishing, mestizos who use net fishing have muscled out the Shipibo men. Lumbering is arduous work in a rainforest where trees grow isolated and have to be manhandled to the nearest body of water in enervating heat and humidity. Understandably, Shipibo men do not engage in it readily. All in all, the sources of cash are less certain and less pleasurable for them than for women.

Men who may want to "cash in" on the tourist trade are stymied by the traditional sexual division of labor. Unlike other world areas where technological and cultural change has benefited men more than women because of the preexisting division of labor (Salisbury 1965: 51), among the Shipibo men have definitely come off the losers. They may eventually redress their disadvantage by greater literacy and mobility than the women, but for the moment production for the tourist market seems to be the only way out. But here, as the following examples show, male autonomy is practically impossible.

In former times, every man had to have his face painted before a fiesta. For this he needed a woman, 'a young bachelor, having no one to paint his face, carves a cylinder seal of hard wood with which to apply the designs' (Lathrap 1970: 185). Even so, a woman would

trace the design on the rollerstamp, or *bētaramēti*, before a man could finish carving it. This was not a satisfactory alternative since the designs would be considerably less complex than those of his hand-painted rivals. Additionally, they would appear at each fiesta resplendent in a new design, while the unhappy bachelor would have to be content with the same old design.

Let us suppose a man wants to carve a sword-club, or *huinó*, out of hard chonta palm wood. He will rough out a blank which he must then hand over to a woman — his wife, sister, mother or daughter — who will then draw a design on either side of the blade. The man will then incise the design into the wood. Thus, although men execute the art, women are the artists. The aesthetician Thomas Munro (1963: 370) distinguished the “technique” of art — the technological and methodological vehicle which most craftsmen master and easily communicate — and the “technic” or psychosocial component of art which is most difficult to master and to paraphrase. Here we have a perfect ethnographic illustration of this distinction, for among the Shipibo it is embodied in different persons. Men do the “technique” and women engage in the “technic” of art.

Whatever item of woodcarving, whether pipe, *shinítapon*, *huinó* or *huinti*, a man might want to sell to the tourists, it would only pique their interest and fetch a good price if it were decorated. To have the object decorated he would have to prevail upon and depend on a woman to execute the design. And in that dependence lies powerlessness. I have waited for weeks for a Shipibo woodcarving while the man I commissioned to carve it approached first one female relative and then another to find someone who would reluctantly draw the design.

THE ARTIST AS DEVIANT

One way to look at the process of discovery, whether it be artistic or scientific, is to regard it as essentially a metaphorical exercise (Leatherdale 1974: 212, 214). It represents a configurative kind of thinking which operates by analogy, seeing connections between things that are not ordinarily connected. Out of the juxtaposition of those things a new perception is created which draws its power from the tension produced by provocatively illfitting parts (Wheelwright 1962: 73). In art work these metaphors are used to

affect an audience by the creative, or playful, recombination of the elements and rules of form elaborated beyond technological necessity.

After defining art in this sense artists must then be defined to have similar characteristics, whether he or she belongs to a tribal or a civilized society. These definitions posit a difference in degree but not in kind. The constraints of style within traditional society will more tightly circumscribe the inventiveness of the artist than the "high information" environment of the modern artist (Roe 1977: 88), but in terms of behavior and based upon my study of Shipibo artists, I assert that a traditional artist operates like his modern counterpart. Certainly the ethnographic data from those societies *which are characterized by elaborate art* (Boas 1927: 156, d'Azevedo 1973: 143, Hendry 1964: 389, etc.) paint a picture of the traditional artist not unlike his modern counterpart. Exceptions to that picture (Bohannon 1961: 248, Messenger 1958: 22) tend to come from societies which produce rudimentary art. Even within them the rule of productive autonomy still holds for the "best" producers as recognized by that society (Bohannon 1961: 250).

Such artists, in the limited areas they can, attempt to inject at least a modicum of personal creativity into a culturally requested or volunteered commission (Biebuyck 1969: 20, Wagley 1977, 213). While I admit that this sounds suspiciously like the romantic notion of the artist (Babbitt 1947: 60), "passionate commitment", the "necessity for autonomy" to "express oneself" through the manipulation of culturally-sanctioned form can be found among traditional artists (Thompson 1969: 182). These characteristics serve to demarcate the artist from other people in his society (Hendry 1964: 401). Especially when this difference is marked by virtuosity, other members of society will give special praise names to such a person (Thompson 1969: 155). On the other hand, deviation from the norm, no matter how benign or valued, still has its risks in small-scale nonliterate societies. Such individuals must have the strength of character to persist in their chosen calling despite some familial or peer opposition (d'Azevedo 1973: 14).

If art is a metaphorical exercise, then one who is deviant (who has had a chance to program himself, and therefore has gotten it at least partly wrong) from the system of shared knowledge and ignorance which is his culture can see more clearly the elements

which can be related than others who have been more completely enculturated. The objectivity of these "natural observers" (Wagley 1977: 223) aids their perception. That is what is meant by the frequent statement that art is "learning to see".

There is yet another reason why marginality is conducive to the production of art and artists. Art, as a configuration, is a man-made universe. Within that universe the artist is in control of what he has created. Art contrasts with the external universe over which the artist has less control. Cognitive dissonance in that world, the difference between fit and reality, will be greater the more marginal one is and thus impell one to art. Thus both acute perception and the inevitable damage which results from seeing too clearly conspire to make art attractive to marginal men.

MARGINAL MALE SHIPIBO ARTISTS

I have used "men" in the generic here for, in the case of the Shipibo, the vast majority of artists are women. Partly because the domestic function of many of the vehicles for art in Shipibo society, there are many artists. Practically every adult woman engages in some aesthetic production. However, wherever there is a democratization of art there will be a broad spectrum of abilities represented, from poor to excellent. The vast majority of women produce perfectly journeymen quality work, fine in technical execution, but unremarkable in concept. None of these women display marginal character traits. Particularly famous women artists, those who have revolutionized the style, form a conspicuous exception to this prosaic lot. Such women, as Wasëmëa mentioned above, are exceptionally assertive and egotistical, personality traits which I have already mentioned do not fit the commonly accepted Shipibo feminine character. Such was Wasëmëa's ability and the insights she contributed to the style that her deviation was accepted as eccentricity.

It is with the very rare male artists that the matter of marginality becomes clearest. By directly contravening the sexual division of labor, such men court public censure. This explains why their art, although generally of quite high technical quality, is undistinguished by design peculiarities. Their art is not radical. Their lives are more works of art than the objects they create, since they combine in radical ways the common stuff of social life.

There are only two such men in the largest Shipibo village of San Francisco de Yarínacocha, José and Martín. I will use their Spanish first names only, as a device to obscure their identities. José is shown in Plate I dressed in Western clothes but wearing a complete man's set of beaded ornaments usually worn on festive occasions. These include the forehead piece, or *moromaiti*, the choker, or *moroshêhua*, the breast plate, or *moropanan*, complete with old Peruvian coins, monkey-teeth bracelets, or *isoshêta*, and multiple beaded bracelets, or *moroshêta*.

Each man violates accepted male behavior and character in a different, but equally illuminating, ways. Both are mature men, in their 40's, and both are married and have children although in either case their family life cannot be regarded as normal. José is widely regarded as being effeminate, although there is no indication of overt homosexual practice. He is the butt of some discrete ridicule since he is now married to an old, and clearly post-menopausal, woman. Thus his marriage, which is often punctuated by separations and has produced no issue, has a nonsexual aspect to it. His first marriage, from whence came his children, ended in divorce. In 1976 both José and his wife were engaged in the rigorous yearlong period of learning which involves the taking of plant "medicines" and the observing of dietary taboos that will lead to the role of a shaman.

José is not very sociable; he and his wife live alone in the jungle, separated from other clusters of huts by a winding path. He is unusually taciturn and diffident in the presence of others. Although hard-working and exceptionally cleanly in his habits, one might even say fastidious for a Shipibo, José can become very morose at times. When drunk, he becomes violent, but his violence is turned against himself rather than against other males as is the accepted norm in Shipibo "pattern drunkenness". Frequently his wife or other female relatives must tie him to a housepost to keep him from chopping his own head off with a machete. Like Hosteen Klah of the Navaho (Grossman 1977: 14) his sexual anomaly may justify José's assumption of the deviant artist role in Shipibo society as well as insulating him from some of the criticism he would otherwise receive, although unlike Klah his anomaly is characterological and not physiological in nature.

Nothing insulates Martín from the criticism his different brand of defiance of established norms instigates. Indeed, such is the social

pressure exerted against Martín that he frequently absents himself from the village by going on prolonged journeys to Lima to sell craftwork. Martín does everything wrong, but shares none of José's sensitivity to the consequences of those actions. During normal social intercourse, Shipibo men are supposed to maintain a dignified mask of impassive sociability. Many is the time I have seen a visitor approach an informant I was speaking to at the moment, and who had privately assured me that he hates the other man because of some slight or injustice, correctly greet and be greeted by my informant and both carry on an apparently amiable conversation. As soon as he turns to leave, however, the visitor will be followed by a whispered imprecation. The social mask will dissolve only during the general drunkenness which results from a fiesta. Only then, once inhibitions are loosened by drink, will conflict rise to the surface in sometimes bloody, and formerly even fatal, fights. Martín is relatively transparent in showing his feelings.

Shipibo men, as women, must also be humble as part of this social facade. One should never call attention to one's accomplishments. Martín is openly boastful. He compares himself favorably with female artists, asserting that he can do just as well as they do in any medium. In actuality, however, even Martín follows José's suit in restricting his art to the traditionally accepted masculine medium of woodcarving. Thus there is conformity even in breaking the rules.

Martín openly disparages the artistic abilities of the women in the compound immediately past his and located at the end of the village. Tourists are ferried out to the village in the dry season by enterprizing mestizos in *peque-peques*, or roofed dugout canoes with pivot-mounted small gasoline engines. As they regularly troop down the long main path of the village in the hot sun, the tourists and their "guides" frequently stop at Martín's house. Martín, unlike other Shipibo men, may be described as a "smart operator", expert at petty chicanery and primitive entrepreneurship. As he goes through his regular demonstration for the tourists, assuring them that, for example, his bow and arrow are the authentic native thing (they are not), he cautions them not to bother going any further, but to buy their souvenirs from him, since the people down at the end of the village don't have anything good to sell. Embittered, the people in the last compound would then see the gaggle of tourists abruptly turn around after having stopped at Martín's hut and return to their boats. Needless to say,

Martín has not won any friends by such characteristically self-centered and exploitative behavior. He has also garnered an unenviable reputation for deceitfulness.

Both José and Martín evidence a certain objectivity to, but consuming interest in, Shipibo art that this discussion attributes to all artists, traditional and modern. When asked why he became an artist, José responded that as a child he decided to help preserve the works of the ancestors, traditions which he saw threatened by the forces of culture change. At around 15 years of age he first began to make *jonshë*, women's woven ligatures worn on the ankles. These are decorated with warp-patterning and are made on a miniature backstrap loom. He also made combs. The combs are made of small cane splints and are wrapped together with colored thread in the middle (Tessman 1928: 74, Tafel 17, Figs. 2, 10-12). The central thread panel is decorated with an intricate wrapped twill design. José rather defensively added that in the old days men were also artists and that therefore he was really just carrying on the tradition. While there is little to support such an allegation as a general pattern, it is true that young boys used to make small combs, complete with their wrapped designs, and give them as gifts to their sweethearts. José is also reputed to have made beadwork, and rather complicated beadwork at that, but since his current wife is an expert in this medium he no longer does so. It might be pointed out that despite the fact that he and his wife work in the same craft shed, she doing pottery and he woodcarving, there is no indication that either has assimilated the style of the other, nor indeed that they even pay much attention to each other's work.

Unlike the women, who tended to find my inquiries into the rules underlying the style incomprehensible, José seemed to share an intellectual interest in the process of discovery. He even volunteered to execute several old designs, or *kaíntanquënëa* (Figure 3 a,b), which were peculiar to woodcarving but had subsequently dropped out of even that medium, so that I could better understand the roots of the style.

Although Martín's original interest in the art seemed a good deal less elevated and more pecuniary in character than José's, he too was interested in my sketched copies of women's designs. He was much more impressed, however, by my original renderings in the style thus indicating that he shared the women's emphasis on

originality. Let us now briefly examine a part of the corpus from the male artist I have the most designs from, José, to see how he differs from women artists and their work.

THE AESTHETIC SYNTACTICS OF JOSÉ'S ART

José works alone, usually sitting on the ground under the roof of his wife's pottery shed (Plate II). After first blanking out the desired shape of the object he is about to decorate, and then coloring it black with a plant dye called *popo*, he begins to execute the design. In technology, José begins to differentiate himself from the women who use another black plant dye for their textiles, the indelible *astoro*. The *popo* which José uses is not colorfast so it is used only on woodwork, but there is no reason why *astoro* could not be used instead. *Popo* is prepared by shaving the bark from a tree called *shëshë*. He mixes the shavings with water and makes a viscous paste by adding the black soot from the small kerosene lamp made out of a tin can which is widely used in the area for illumination.

He draws the design on the flat black surface with a pencil whose reflective lead makes the design stand out. When he decorates a white surface with black designs, José will prefer the traditional



PLATE II: José Sketching A Design

bamboo lath. For white-on-black designs he follows the penciled lines with a knife to incise the design into the wood. The blade penetrates the stained surface to reveal the soft white wood beneath.

As is the case with women (Roe 1977: 81), José considers the main labor to be in conceiving the design, not in its execution. He composes the intricate machinery of the formlines in his head prior to execution. He will look at the space to be decorated for a long period before touching pencil to surface. This evaluation of proportions means that he anticipates and corrects for the problems of crowding, deletion or radical alteration of original design concept which marks the art of "backwoods" Panoans. To be sure, this process may use preliminary practice sketches for occasionally José will casually pick up any flatsided object and try out a design. Plate III illustrates such a sketch on a green plantain. José had discarded it, but I retrieved and photographed it. This fruit "sampler" shows the same playful spirit that animates female artists.

Watching José and other skilled artists, I marveled at the rapidity with which they executed designs without tentative sketching. The designs appear as if by magic. The architectonic structure of the style is revealed as the key central motif is first drawn. Then the rest of the design branches out from it. However, José does not begin in the middle of the design field. He proceeds in a more "lineal" way than the women by starting at one end of an oblong field and then working toward the other end, from left to right.

Whichever method is used, it becomes clear that the lattice structure of the style is based on general rules which guide the realization of particular designs. When alterations occur in a lattice they are "systematic" and not ad-hoc. To explain why this is so I must describe the formal properties of technique in Shipibo art.

Of the two components in my definition of art, "technique" and "technic", the former is easier to write about because it can consciously be described by artists themselves. The study of technique can first be conducted by a modal or componential analysis on a collection of artifacts the observer has witnessed being made. This is done using quantitative measures to break the artifacts down into their component parts. The analysis is processual rather than typological. It can best be represented as a flow-chart (Lathrap, ms.) that orders the assembly of parts by technologically and behaviorally

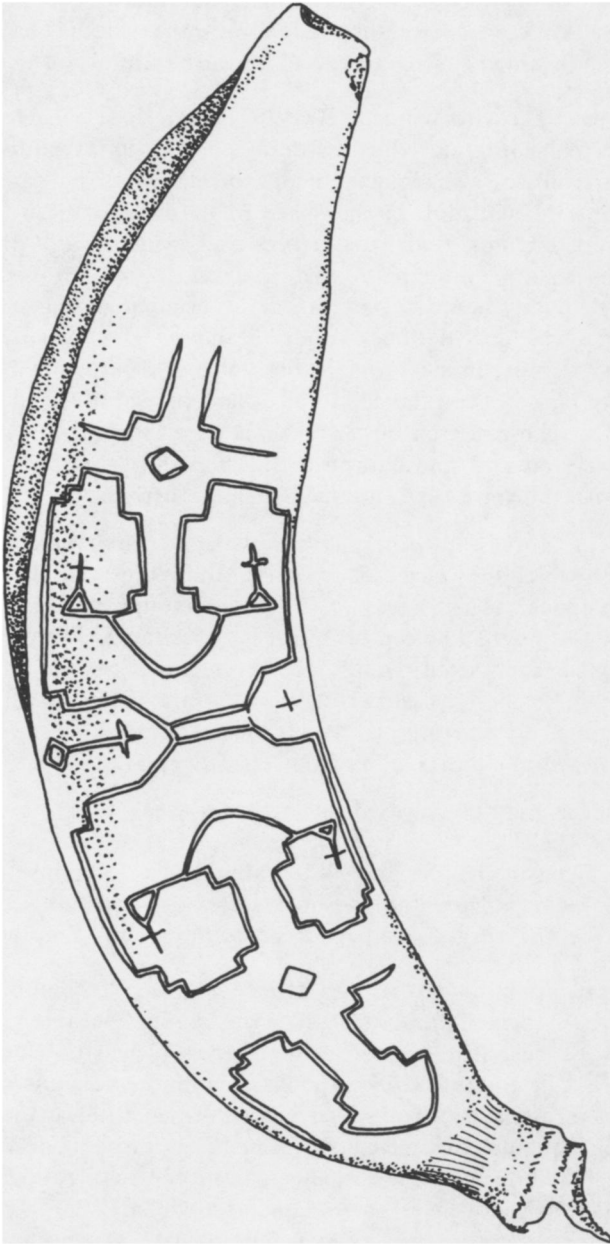


PLATE III: A Carved Plantain "Sampler" By José

predetermined properties. For example, a pot may be described by the necessary steps of its fabrication, starting from the base plug and ending with the lip.

The concept of syntax adds to such an analysis by positing that logically ordered and recursive rule sets can be formulated for the way elements are combined or novel elements added to generate new aesthetic statements (Muller 1971, Raymond, De Boer and Roe 1975: 24-25). The method is analogous to the generative grammar approach in linguistics (Chomsky 1957). "Aesthetic syntactics" posits "kernel statements" from which layouts can be generated. These layouts can be arranged in linked "derivational chains" which paraphrase existent designs and also predict new ones. The predictions are hypothetical connecting steps that link the existing designs together. The ability to deal with a new corpus that did not go into the formulating of the system is the way out of tautology in this methodology.

I do not claim an identical correspondence between the formal "etic" rules deduced from analyzing behavior and resultant artifacts and the "emic" rules which may be presumed to exist in the minds of the artists. I do claim that, since the rules were inferred according to a principle of parsimony while engaged in feedback interaction (where I influence him and he influences me) with the artist as a prelude to my producing similar art, my rules are also "emic". Homology, or general similarity, deduced from the ability to communicate aesthetically in a mutually-intelligible fashion, and not point-for-point identity, is all that is required of the rules. This is not a mysterious process but exactly what one does in learning a foreign language outside of a classroom, only in this case it is the language of a foreign art. The goal is an actor, or "competence" oriented model of the decisions which underlie the production and appreciation of aesthetic artifacts.

Figure 2 applies the aesthetic syntactic approach to José's woodcarving. Illustrating its advantage of parsimony, four actual design layouts, numbers 3, 5, 8 and 10, are derived from a kernel layout, number 1, by positing other designs, marked with an asterisk, as hypothetical intercalary steps that tie the received layouts together in three derivational chains, A, B and C. The kernel statement is not hypothetical since I confronted José with it and he opined that it was "good", i.e., entirely possible given the conventions

of the style. It is also possible to wait and see whether the connecting stages will be spontaneously produced. They are predictions which, if realized, will help to validate the model.

The logic of the system's rules, why certain stages such as B4 were placed before others like B5, operates on three levels. These levels can be described using mathematical terms. The first level is algebraic since it corresponds to the association and symmetrical manipulations of elements which are unmodified save positionally. The second level involves various deformations of the elements as they respond to design field pressures such as slight vertical and horizontal compression. This level is topological since nothing new has been added or subtracted from the elements although their outlines are altered. In figure 2 these first two levels are incorporated in the kernel statement. The last level is mathematically most interesting since it corresponds to singularity theory whereby elements are altered by actual merging or contraction, deleted or added, according to ever-increasing compression. This level is represented by the three chains themselves, each of which have taken a different tack in further developing the kernel layout.

The organizing principle used is that design layouts in Shipibo art proceed from uniform simple layouts to heterogenous complex layouts as a response to design field compression. For example, the vertical line connecting the vertically aligned diamonds in the center of each staggered lattice of the kernel layout is added in B4. At the same time every other diamond turns into a short vertical line. Under increasing vertical compression, the two parallel lines of the lateral arms of every other vertical column of stacked crosses contracts into a single horizontal line in B5 leaving their ends as stubby crosses and their vertically stacked bodies intact.

Further, the aesthetic syntactics approach is well suited for eliciting principles from artists themselves. Figure 3c shows the differences between the designs of female and male Shipibo artists which a derivational chain of the common step-and-bar motif can achieve. This motif occurs particularly in the *kaíntanquënëa* of figure 3a,b,e and f. Unlike earlier attempts such as Hart's scheme for the development of the Greek fret and scroll (James 1909: 199-202), where the stages of progression were self-derived and not subjected to ethnographic testing, it is now possible to arrive at similar chains in a verifiable setting.

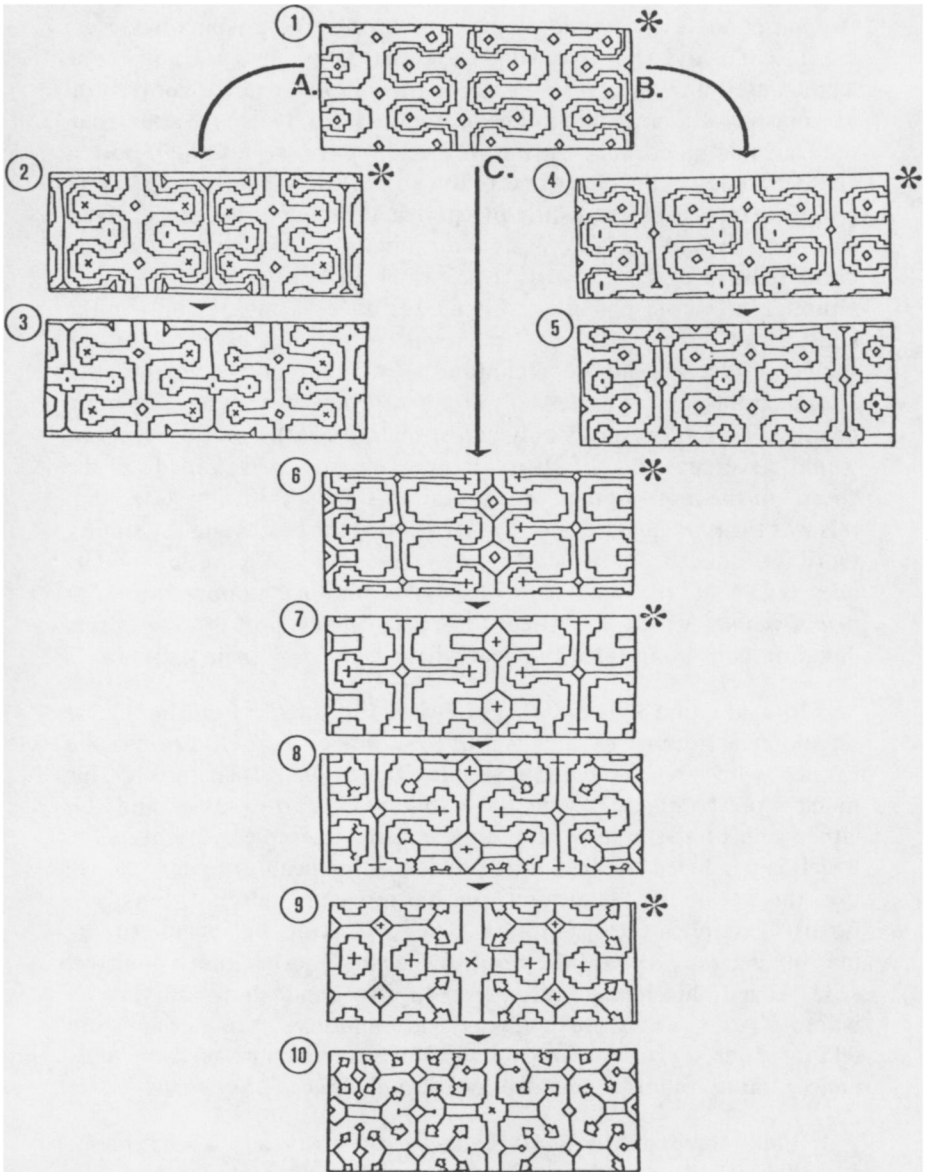


FIGURE 2: *Three Shipibo Derivational Chains*

Figure 3cl represents the kernel element similar to the basic unit of the conservative backwoods Panoan styles like the Cashinahua (Roe, ms. 1). José said that it was ugly and that neither he nor any of the women used it. Hence, its presence in this Shipibo chain is conjectural and marked with an asterisk. The second step, 3c2, is also represented in the Cashinahua corpus, but not in the Shipibo case, although both it and 3cl are logically antecedent to the Shipibo designs which follow. It too, therefore, is marked with an asterisk although José opined that it was “not so bad”. Figure 3c2’s more favorable evaluation stems no doubt from its closer similarity to 3c3 which José declared to be “so-so”, although he would not use it. Figure 3c3 differs from 3c2 only in the addition of a step element, or *tsitsón*, to the upper bend of the shank, a typical Shipibo technique. Note that as the possibilities approach the specific canons of Shipibo art their ratings become more positive. This, however, is only in a speculative realm for José since he would never use any of them. If another *tsitsón* is added to the “head” of the motif figure 3c4 is produced. José specifically stated that this was the kind he used, as in 3b. By deleting the head a slightly similar motif is produced, 3c5, which José also uses, as in 3e. Figure 3e shows its occurrence in the miniature backstrap loom support bars, or *pīsha šhano*, which are used to weave men’s pockets, or *pīsha*, dangling bags hung from the neck which men carry their trifles in.

In evaluating figures 3c4 and 3c5 as the “best” of all the logical possibilities present in the chain, José ranges himself against the women who prefer the even simpler figure 3c6. José ranked this much more common variant *below* his two favorites. José lands on either side of the women, for he also likes a simpler variant, 3c6a, which is produced by deleting a portion of the head of figure 3c6. He uses this possibility, as in figure 3a, but the women do not. Finally, a further complication of figure 3c6, 3c7, can be produced by multiplying the steps on the head of the step-and-bar motif to three. José judged this female variant as “pretty good” but said that he would not use it. More complex four and five step variants are seldom done, even by women, and José rated them as completely unacceptable. Indeed, they also looked unbalanced to my eye.

While some of the *kaintanquënëa* designs, such as figure 3f, owe their structure to their ease of execution in a wood medium, they clearly show small but important differences between male and female art. The character of these discriminations resemble Ruth

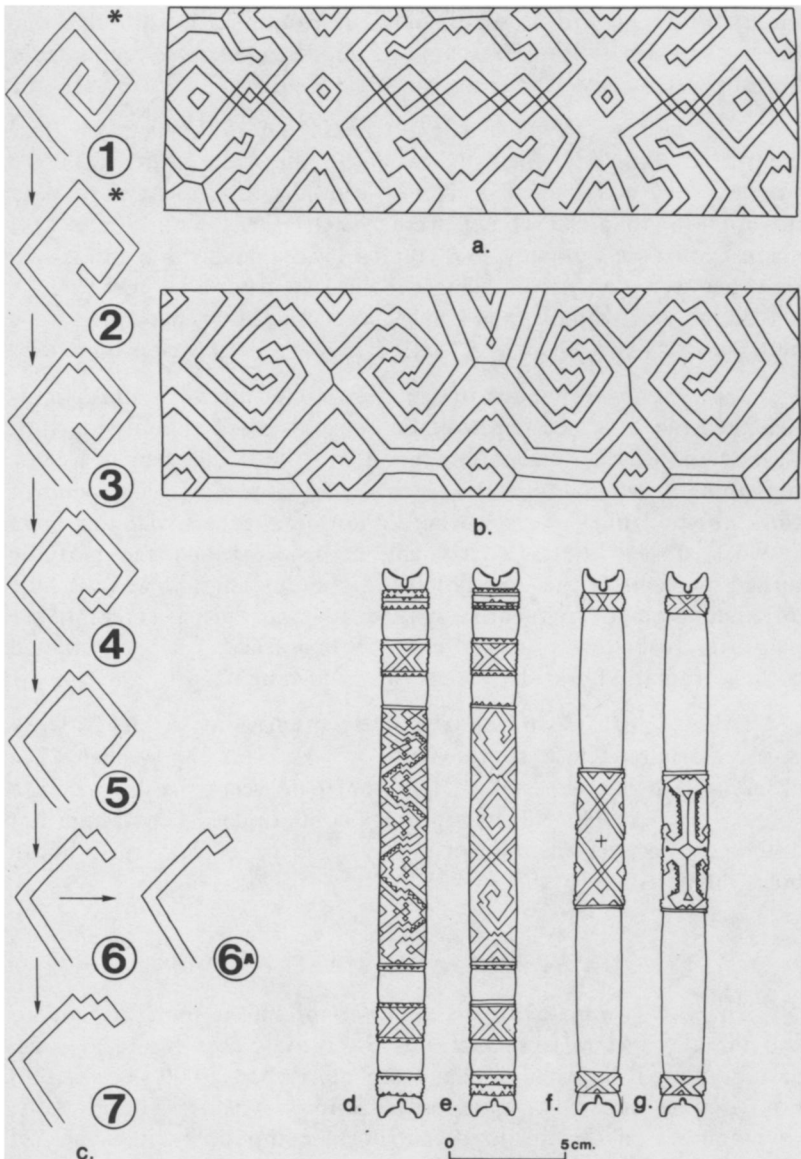


FIGURE 3: *Micro-Stylistic Differences, José / Women*

Bunzel's (1929: 70) observation of Zuñi potters who judged equally minute differences to be significant. For example, they thought that the use of three or four elements was good, and six was permissible, but the use of five elements was not good.

The ease with which I extracted these rankings from José contrasted with the difficulty in doing the same thing with the women. José was a great deal more candid and self-assertive about his opinions than the women were. When asked to rank her works against other's a woman would laugh self-consciously and admit only that they were "ok". Even when I took a pot from a woman to copy her design, she would say in a self-deprecating tone that others were better artists, and ask why I wasted my time with her production?

José readily responded to questions about his work and quickly indicated the "best" design he made in each series I commissioned. If I asked him whether his art was "good" or "pretty", he would say yes, something no woman did. His attitude was coupled with independent work habits. Unlike women, who did not mind others watching them at work, José withdrew to the end of his workshop and partially turned his back. It was always hard to see the design he was working on. The women frequently worked together on a single house platform. José always worked alone. When asked if he ever studied with a woman, he said that he was self-taught.

Even so, it is clear from the above discussion that José's work was remarkably close to the orthodox style of the women. The differences, it is true, enabled the women to recognize his art in a "blind" test I conducted, but they are subtle indeed. The important differences between them occur not in the artifacts they create but in their relationship to the tourist trade.

TOURIST ART AND MALE ARTISTS

The only two male artists I am aware of among both the Shipibo and the Conibo are from the largest and most acculturated village, San Francisco de Yarínacocha. With more than 1,000 people, San Francisco is unusually large for a Shipibo village. Traditionally, an emphasis on the localized matrilineal compound and a lack of institutionalized social-political devices to mend cleavages, causes Shipibo villages to fission into smaller units before they reach this size. Clearly, what is keeping San Francisco together is the presence

of a school, a church, and, most importantly, its proximity to Pucallpa and its bountiful dry season tourist trade.

I should note that Shipibo art is emphatically not a "tourist art". Due to the incidental, unorganized and entrepreneurially undeveloped character of the tourist trade among the Shipibo, it only takes "excess" production from the native system. No effort is made to "sell" goods save to press them under the nose of a buyer accompanied by a gruff stating of the price. Only Martín energetically "hawks" his merchandise. Unlike the well developed trading system of areas like Oaxaca, Mexico, where, based on an indigenous peripatetic trader pattern, traders travel great distances on a regular basis to wholesale or retail goods, trips by bus to Lima are made infrequently by Shipibo and have more of a holiday than a commercial feeling to them.

Males sell their products directly, as do women, either in the village or by taking a boat to Pucallpa where they stroll about the streets accosting tourists. No Shipibo has opened a stall in the small markets of Pucallpa. Only one store buys Shipibo "artesanía", but it is usually used as a "dumping ground" by men or women reluctant to carry unsold goods back to the village.

This haphazard pattern explains the strength of the "dual market" (Roe 1977: 83) among the Shipibo. In the internal market, which is largely for personal use and gift exchange, high standards of craftsmanship are maintained. On the other hand, the external or tourist market involves things which are made explicitly for buyers who are unfamiliar with the craft. Hence, lower quality is sometimes produced for the external market. However, the tourist market is not entirely a negative force for it provides a needed arena of "protected deviation". As such, it is a valuable area for artistic experimentation, one form of which is archaism.

The two male artists produce for the external market. In compensation for the internal "aesthetic quarantine" they at least have the potential for greater affluence derived from the tourist trade than most men can hope for. Ordinary men sell bow and arrow sets decorated with colored string and feathers, but José's incised woodcarving is more profitable than their work. He goes regularly to Pucallpa with ten or so small canoes adorned with geometric designs. Due to their distinctness from other men's work, he need make no

effort to approach the tourists, they approach him. In 1976 he sold them for 1000 soles or about 20 dollars each. This was more than other men got for arrow sets, despite their higher cost (the colored thread was a significant expense). Indeed, this was more than most women could get for all but their largest pottery jars. Tourists are reluctant to buy large pots because they are difficult to transport. Moreover, men frequently returned home with unsold arrow sets, but José always managed to sell all his canoes. However, José does not fully exploit his greater source of income. He does not accumulate capital like other men but works in a more leisurely manner to satisfy his modest desire for consumer goods. Perhaps in that way he avoids demands by relatives who might otherwise attempt to "share" in the wealth. Martín has gotten into so many unsound deals and owes so much money that he too does not realize the potential benefits of his work.

The most significant difference between José's and the women's designs emerged from their respective tourist production. José would duplicate a design layout on different areas of an artifact. I never saw a woman do this since their canon specifies virtuosity in applying different layouts to different design fields on the same object. Further, no woman would apply the same design to two different objects of the same kind, even if those objects were designed for different tourists. José also violated this rule by making four or five toysized canoes with the same design. He realized that a different stranger would buy each one and because he had no internal demand for novelty he repeated the same design. In this respect José approached the "craft" end of the continuum while the women occupied the "art" end. This distinction is based on a behavioral definition that contrasts the innovative process of art with the stereotypic fulfillment of craft (*Ibid.*: 80).

CONCLUSION

The anomalous role of male artists in a society which defines art as the province of women caused José to be more objective about his art than the majority of women were about theirs. In this case, however, his objectivity did not lead to greater insight into the fundamental structure of the style, and hence to greater innovation, but forced José into transforming it into a kind of cottage industry.

This investigation is summarized in figure 4. Cell A produces craft of a stereotyped and orthodox character under the guise of art due to its violation of the sex roles of Shipibo society. Cell B produces craft of a normal kind, the technical vehicle customarily executed by men to carry (when it is applied to a "male" medium like woodcarving) women's art. Cell C is the most relevant for the generic model of artists presented here since it both conforms with the sex role structure and also produces revolutionary art of high quality. Cell D, because of its compliance with Shipibo sex roles, produces orthodox art.

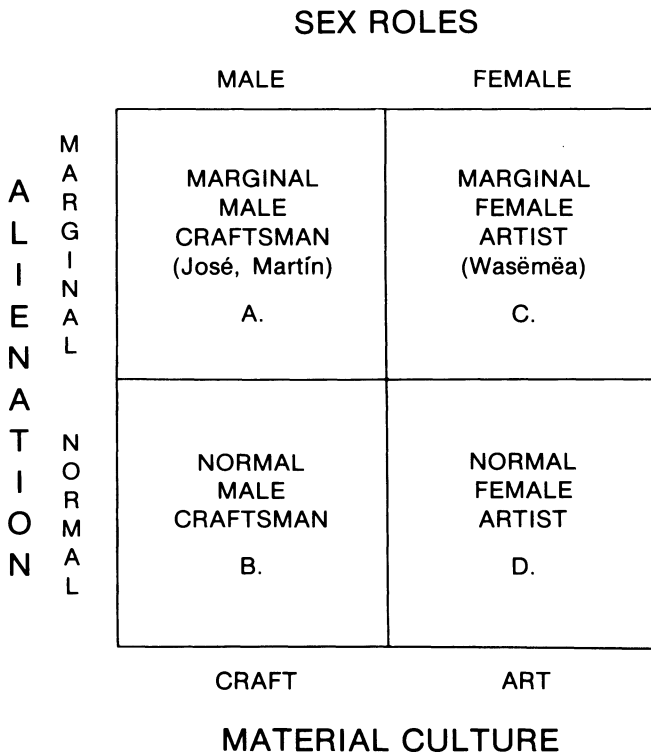


FIGURE 4: *Male and Female Shipibo Artists Compared*

Thus, the role of marginal male artists today is unimportant for the Shipibo style as a whole while the role of marginal female artists is, as it has always been, crucial. Culture triumphs over those who have the courage, or perhaps just the misfortune, to confront its basic patterns but lack the insight or social position to compound those categories into a new creation.

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