

**MATSON MUSEUM
OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

**RECORDING
QUECHUA
WORLDVIEW
IN TEXTILES**



Overview

When the Spanish arrived in the Andean region of South America, they encountered the Incan Empire.

Although they had no written language, the Inca recorded worldview and conveyed status through geometric designs woven into cloth. The Quechua, descendants of the Inca, continue to use symbols in their textiles in order to visually communicate aspects of their mythology and way of life. Indeed, textiles appear to be a valued means of sustaining an indigenous identity and enduring beliefs in the face of modern influences. This exhibit explores the symbolism embedded in textiles from the Quechuan towns of Cuzco, Pisac, Tinta and Qu'ero in southern Peru. Although most of them were produced in the mid-20th century, some date earlier before the region experienced a lot of change due to contact with the outside world.



Inca to Quechua Textiles

Andean people have been weaving cloth for millennia. They utilized fibers from llamas, vicunas, and alpacas, as well as cotton. The Incan government controlled the production and distribution of all cloth. Sacred fabric woven with vicuna wool by accla (female virgins of the sun god temple) was placed on idols and worn by rulers. As descendants of the Inca, the Quechua revere cloth. Everyone wears belts (chumpi) around their waists. Women sling square cloths (Iliklla) over their backs. The hats with ear flaps (chullos) and the ponchos are elements of a man's costume. The Quechua also weave small bags to carry coca leaves and money.



Color Symbolism

Modern Quechua weavers embed meaning in color. For example, in the Apurimac region just west of Cuzco, red signifies the male principle or the dry part of the agricultural year. Green represents the female principle, fertility, or the wet part of the cycle. Yellow symbolically mediates between the red and the green, the male and female principles. Altering colors in complex designs may change their meaning. In diamond motifs, dark lines symbolize sunset, while light lines denote sunrise.



Inkarri The Culture

Hero

Designs (ch'unchu) with two inverted triangles represent the head and body of Inkarri, the first Inca and a Quechua culture hero. The son of an uncivilized woman and the sun, Inkarri taught farming to the men. His wife trained women to weave. When the Spanish arrived in Cuzco, they decapitated Inkarri and stole his head. The myth ends with the prediction that this hero will return and his body will be reconstituted with the help of his father.



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208 Carpenter Building

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11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



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