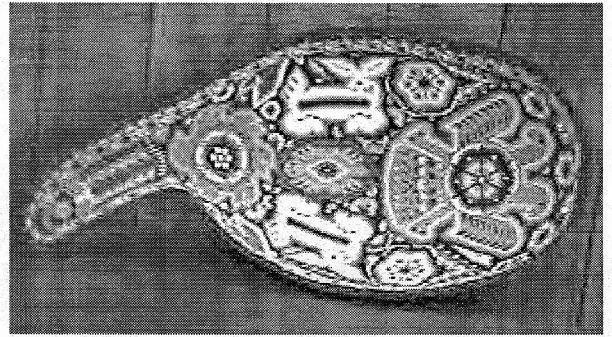


# Gourds in the Huichol Style

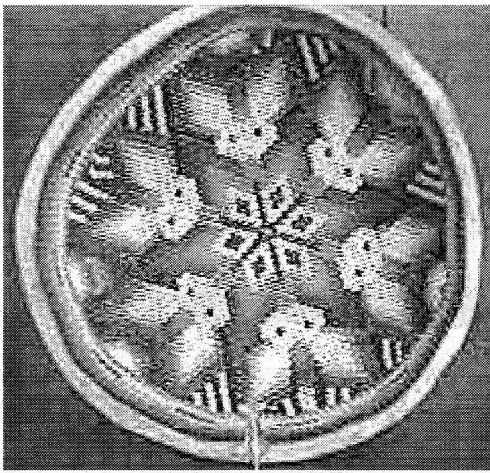
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Near Puerto Vallarta, in west Central Mexico, live the Huichol Indians, an indigenous people best known for their beautiful beaded ceremonial bowls. They have no written language, but called themselves by a local word meaning "healer". This word has been corrupted to the present day word Huichol, pronounced "wetchol" or sometimes "weechol". They live in desolate, inaccessible areas of the states of Jalisco and Nayarit, in "ranchos", scattered settlements.



The Huichol are a deeply spiritual people whose beliefs include wolves that speak to them, rain-bearing snakes, and jaguars that bring messages from God. One fourth of the men are shaman, or healers, who use hallucinogenic peyote to bring enlightenment and visions of color or shape to transfer to their beaded bowls or yarn drawings. The beaded ceremonial bowls are called "rakure" in Huichol or "jicara" in Spanish.

When jicara were first evolved, they were decorated with colorful bits of shell, bone, clay, turquoise, coral, etc. In later years, as today, they began to use glass seed beads in many colors.



The sticky mixture pressed into the bowl is a specific formula of pine pitch and beeswax (without the pitch, you couldn't soften the wax enough to use it). It remains very tacky long enough to do the design.

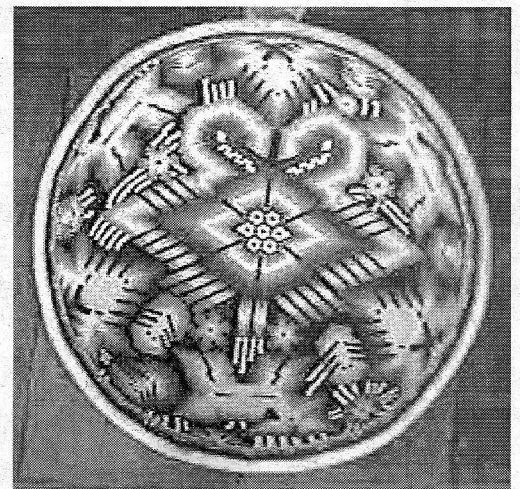
Before beginning your gourd jicara, you need to have a design in mind. Drawing one in color or using a bead grid are good ways to begin. Then obtain beads in the colors you require. Next, a gourd bowl is coated inside with a thin layer of the melted beeswax and pine pitch mixture (or the wax mixture is kneaded and warmed in the hands until pliable enough to smear inside the bowl- my preferred method). The thickness of the wax layer should not exceed about 2/3's of the depth of your beads. Once the bowl interior is completely coated, your basic design can be scratched onto the surface of the wax. Then the beads are added, hole side showing. Usually beginning from the center bottom of the bowl (depending on the intended design), beads are pressed into the sticky beeswax - only about halfway or 2/3's-way into the wax. Layer the beads in a circle, nestling each row into the one before, overlapping.

With size 10 or 11 beads, you'll probably have a six-sided pattern forming. It depends on how many beads you use to go around the first bead! You can force your design to be six-sided by limiting your second row of beads to only six. Most of the bowls I've seen are six-sided designs or are completely freehand. Like all artwork, ceremonial bowl designs can vary greatly, both in design and color.

As you keep adding beads, beginners may occasionally have small gaps where the spacing isn't perfect. You can solve this one of two ways: place a bead in sideways wherever a space is too small, or spread nearby beads to help cover the gap (best solution for symmetrical designs). Practice will gain you smoother beading techniques.

## Handy optional tools to have nearby:

- (1) sharp fine point tweezers or curved point tweezers
- (2) a sharp pointed awl whose point will go into the hole of a bead far enough so you can pick it up
- (3) stylus with medium ball end to press beads into the wax evenly
- (4) wooden clay-working tools with smooth spoon-like ends for spreading the beeswax mixture
- (5) bead tray with multiple indentations for bead colors
- (6) old terry washcloth or cotton dishtowel devoted to wiping bees-wax from your fingertips as you work
- (7) large reclosable plastic bag to keep your bowl in while you're working so it will not dry out too quickly
- (8) heat embossing gun for softening beeswax (meant for rubber stamping)



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# Huichol Style

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When your bowl is finished and the beads either end just below the rim or continue over the lip of your bowl, leave it in the open to dry. If the beeswax shows excessively between and on your beads, a heating gun can be used to soften the wax slightly so that it flows back down into the beads. Do this only after finished and be careful not to overheat your beeswax mixture.

Always display your bowl away from heat or sunlight.

If you have questions, feel free to contact Kathy James, 229-420-9982, or [klaymaker@aol.com](mailto:klaymaker@aol.com). Supplies, including the special beading wax can be purchased at [www.PrimitiveOriginals.com](http://www.PrimitiveOriginals.com).

The lovely beaded bowls on these pages are good examples of Huichol art which you can see and buy at El Centro de la Rosa. I encourage you to visit them at [http:// huichol-art.com](http://huichol-art.com).

