little access to power, influence or the Spanish-language press. To speak out against either side in the conflict was dangerous, and vengeance was swift and merciless. The merest suspicion of sympathy for Sendero Luminoso could result in accusations of complicity, resulting in disappearance, arrest or imprisonment. Those who dared to condemn the terrorists openly, especially those in positions of prominence, were threatened and frequently assassinated.

Artists' Responses

During the height of the conflict in the 1980s, a group of popular artists, poets and musicians held a clandestine meeting in the city of Ayacucho. The artists – whose weavings, ceramics, carvings and paintings echoed centuries of Peruvian art – were from families of artisans who had kept alive Andean artistic traditions. They used traditional forms and symbols to depict the customs and history of their people. In these extraordinary times they determined to address the immediate events that confronted them. Aware of the danger but determined not to be held hostage by fear, they resolved to speak out against the violence. Among these artists were Edwin Sulca, a weaver; Benjamin Pizarro, a sculptor; Pablo Jerí, a ceramic artist; and Claudio Jimenez, who worked in the traditional *retablos,* carved and painted wooden boxes with plaster figures. At great risk to themselves they decided to use their work to plead for peace and to protest the outrages that scarred their society.

Similarly in Chorrillos, one of the shantytowns near Lima, painters from the *Asociación de Artistas Populares de Sarhua* (ADAPS) workshop – Primitivo Evanán, Valeriana Vivanco, Juan Quispe and Julian Ramos – recorded the terrifying events that devastated their hometown of Sarhua, a small town high in the Andes in the area of Ayacucho. Working on traditional wooden panels, the group began in 1990 a series of twenty-four paintings entitled ***¿Piraq causa?*** (***Who Is to Blame?***) which deals with the incursion of Sendero Luminoso into the life of Sarhua. Primitivo Evanán has spoken of the reason for making this series.

> *No one talks about our village, no journalists go there... To whom should we complain about the violent acts we are being subjected to? For us there are no human rights. The only way we can bear witness to the events in our community is to paint them. We regard these works as part of an extensive project to save our cultural values.*[2]

The cycle of paintings in this exhibition documents events during the height of the conflict, a period of three years from 1980–1983. The paintings tell the story from the perspective of the peasant population who had no stake in the conflict and had done nothing to instigate the war. The cycle documents their losses: the deaths, the departures, the moral and physical devastation to an ancient and revered way of life.

According to the paintings, Sarhua was drawn into the conflict through an internal dispute. A villager with political connections to authorities in the city of Ayacucho claimed for himself part of the pasture lands that had for centuries been held in common. When a group of the villagers tore down his fences to reestablish the land as community property, he denounced the destruction as an act by terrorists. The government sent in a group of Sinchis, an elite paramilitary group, to investigate. Instead the soldiers attacked and brutalized the unsuspecting townspeople, who became both fearful and enraged at the injustice. The paintings recount the events that followed: the infiltration of Sendero Luminoso, who exploited the town's anger and resentment; the execution of the mayor and a church official in the town plaza; the forcible recruitment of the village youth into Sendero; the retaliation of the Peruvian military; and the town's desperate attempts to quell the violence.

The experiences recounted on the panels were by no means unique to Sarhua. The brothers Nicario, Edilberto and Claudio Jimenez, and the brothers Hugo, Nino and Edgar Blanco Bautista of Ayacucho used *retablos*, an artform unique to the region, to depict graphically the events occurring almost daily on the once quiet streets of the city of Ayacucho. In the brightly painted boxes tiny figures reenact the war: violent encounters between terrorists and the military, the assasination of journalists, secret prisons, bodies thrown into makeshift graves. In ***Las Sombras del Amor*** by the Blanco Bautista brothers, a grieving peasant holds a crescent moon, an Andean deity, while at his feet smaller figures depict the murder of his wife by militants, and the grave from which her spirit rises.

The weaver Edwin Sulca, educated in the traditional forms and symbols of Andean culture by his grandfather, Ambrosio Sulca, a prominent weaver of Ayacucho, was threatened personally by Sendero Luminoso. Sulca nevertheless continued his work, making large tapestries to tell the story of the war in Ayacucho. His weavings encode references to the violence, depicting in symbolic form the tears of women and children, the silence of the gods, and the modern tools of war: guns, planes and bombs. In his piece ***The Final Judgment Day*** Sulca presents a complicated allegory of the problems of Ayacucho. It is, he says, a land bleeding through all the wounds that are constantly opened, where death is continuously knocking at every door, threatening both young and old. Through the modified geometry of old Andean patterns he shows bullets, guns and exploding bombs. He prays for judgment from the Andean deities, the Christian God and the powers of nature, condemning those who have destroyed the peace and pleading for reconciliation.

Epilogue

The conflict begun in Ayacucho was repeated throughout Peru during the 1980s and into the early 1990s, spreading through the country until Lima was itself encircled. Bombings occurred almost daily on the streets of the capital, and the city was darkened night after night as electrical towers were dynamited. Prominent citizens, popular leaders and church people were assassinated in broad daylight. The country was paralyzed by fear.

Then suddenly in September 1992, Abimael Guzman – the leader of Sendero Luminoso – was apprehended by the Peruvian security forces and imprisoned. The government arrested hundreds of suspected terrorists and tried them before anonymous judges; many, both guilty and innocent, were condemned on the basis of accusation and hearsay. The open conflict which engaged most of the country abated, but violence still smolders in outlying regions. The underlying social and economic problems which fueled the terrorism remain unaddressed.

Peruvian popular artists, working with no support and little recognition, continue to document the daily lives of their people, whose joys and sorrows, hopes and griefs might otherwise pass unnoticed, unrecorded, unremarked. Their work opens a window of understanding on a world rarely seen and on experiences seldom told and little understood. Through their efforts to preserve their cultural values and traditions, they share with us access to the complex history and experience of the Andean people.

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[1] From *The Peru Reader*, edited by Orin Starn, Ivan DeGregori and Robin Kirk. Duke University Press, 1995.

[2] From a 1991 conversation with Swiss journalist Peter Gaupp.

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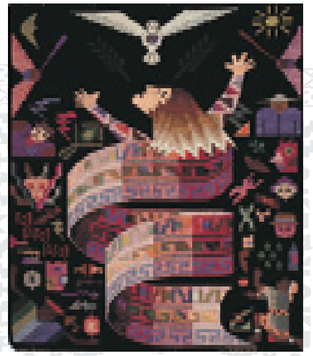
Ayacucho



Tradition and Crisis in Peruvian Popular Arts

Organized by
Con/Vida: Popular Arts of the Americas

Curated by
Barbara Cervenka

Ayacucho

Tradition and Crisis in Peruvian Popular Art

Huamanguino

Huamanguino chinkarqun
¿imay hora?
chawpi tuta chaychaytas
wasinmanta
allin puñuykuy horatas
urqurunku, aparunku

Someone from Huamanga has disappeared!
At what time?
About midnight
from her house
at the hour of deepest sleep
they have taken and kidnapped her.

When she screamed after being hit
her mother protested, crying
binding her hands tightly
they took her
covering her eyes
they dragged her away.

Months and years have passed
Where can she be?
Perhaps under the stony ground
becoming earth
or among the thorns
budding like wild flowers.

Ranulfo Fuentes [1]

Reclutamiento de Jovenes

Forced Recruitment of the Youth
The terrorists force young men and women to join their ranks; a few are convinced by the talk, others follow from fear of death. When the young people leave, members of their families cry, knowing that they will never see their relatives again.

Fusilamiento

Execution
At 6:00 a.m. in October, 1982, two dignitaries of the community – the mayor and the church property steward – are shot after the terrorist group levels false accusations against them. Their children, family members and the entire community are forced to watch the execution. The horrified relatives weep desperately. This fraticide causes chaos in the community; some people flee, others commit suicide or hide in the mountains.

Note: Text is translated from the Spanish inscriptions on the paintings.

Sinchis

Counterinsurgency Police
On September 30, 1981, during a storm with wind, lightening and hail, 13 Sinchis [a governmental paramilitary group] run wild. Armed with automatic pistols and tear gas bombs, they wreak havoc in the community – attacking children and single women, plundering shops and houses, stealing money, ruthlessly beating people bloody, and taking away innocent men and women.

Descuartizamiento

Dismemberment
En route to a celebration, two innocent girls are abducted by 39 armed soldiers who mistake the girls for terrorists. The soldiers rape the defenseless girls – then maim one and throw the other down a ravine, shooting her dead. There is no excuse for such irrational behavior by the soldiers, who act like beasts in human form. Who has ever heard of such cruelty! What a sorry fate it is to be an Indian peasant woman.

AYACUCHO, A COLONIAL CITY IN THE ANDES and once site of an ancient Peruvian civilization, became during the 1980s a battleground between the rival forces of the Peruvan military and the Maoist insurgency called *Sendero Luminoso* or the Shining Path. During those years of conflict countless people lost their homes, their relatives, their very lives. The streets of Ayacucho emptied as thousands fled in fear of the violence, becoming refugees in their own country. The terrible drama of Ayacucho is recounted in an extraordinary body of artwork that developed during that time and is represented in this exhibition. Using forms of expression traditional to Ayacucho – weaving, painting and *retablos* as well as popular songs and ballads – artists told the painful story of the events that tore apart the fabric of traditional life, turning neighbors into enemies.

The Ayacuchan songwriter Ranulfo Fuentes writes in Quechua, the language of the indigenous people of Peru. In his poem referring to the disappearance of a young woman from Huamanga, the Quechua name of Ayacucho, he echoes the frightening question "where are they?" heard in countless voices throughout Central and South America during the past quarter century. In Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, throughout Chile, Argentina and Brazil, in Mexico, Cuba, Haiti and Peru, partisan groups have waged wars within their own boundaries, and governments have sought by force to silence voices of dissent raised against the wealthy and powerful. In Peru where large portions of the population live in dire poverty, where unemployment affects more than seventy percent of the work force and issues of human rights and social justice are routinely ignored, the violence of Sendero Luminoso and other groups swept like a fire through the Andean highlands, threatening both the control of the central government and traditional ways of life.

Members of the revolutionary group, Sendero Luminoso, began their insurgency against the Peruvian government in remote Andean villages. The movement began in the early 1970s in the area of Ayacucho, one of the poorest and least developed regions in Peru, inspired by the leftist ideological debate which centered around Abimael Guzman, a charismatic philosophy professor at the University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga. By the end of the 1970s the movement became increasingly radical, moving underground to begin a campaign of violence. Senderistas mounted attacks on police stations and burned agricultural cooperatives; they moved into villages, held mock trials in the town plazas, condemned and executed mayors and community leaders, and forcibly recruited young people. As the group gained power and control in isolated mountain villages and towns and in the city of Ayacucho itself, the central government finally awoke to the threat of an organized and armed opposition. The Peruvian military mounted a ferocious campaign to quell the threat of the rising insurgency. The resulting war between Sendero and the armed forces was fought in hamlets and shantytowns, on backroads and fields. The conflict spread from Ayacucho into neighboring areas and districts, moving inexorably until it infiltrated the vast ring of shantytowns surrounding the capital city of Lima, hundreds of miles away. The victims of this war were predominantly the poor who found themselves caught between two unrelenting forces. They were accused and assassinated by both Senderistas and government soldiers, threatened, beaten, "disappeared," and buried in unmarked graves.

Few stories of these occurrences in remote Andean villages were retold outside of Peru. In Lima, official newspapers reported government efforts and successes against the insurgency; the newspaper published by Sendero Luminoso, *El Diario*, was filled with invective and the angry tirades of Abimael Guzman, then referred to as President Gonzalo. But those most affected, Peru's Quechua-speaking peasant population, were voiceless, having