

Abstract

My thesis is a case study of a Mexican ethnic group *Huichol*. In my work I attempted to provide an insight into a spiritual view rooted in pre-Columbian rituals adapted by the influence of five centuries of contact with European culture, through studying relations of Huichols to *peyote*.

The goal of the thesis was to map the meaning of *peyote* cactus in everyday life, religion and art of Huichol Indians in recent times, and explain what relationship do current Huichol have to art artefacts created not only for their own community, but also for commercial purposes. To answer my research questions I analyzed semi-structured interviews I lead with Huicholes during my 7 months stay in Mexiko.

The interviews revealed that *peyote* has a central importance in their culture. In everyday life it represents the embodiment of gods and ancestors and the main means of communication with gods. Not only does it allow them to „meet“ gods, but also to communicate with them, ask for advice and answers to their questions. The whole Huichol cosmovision is centered around *peyote*.

Peyote is also significant for Huichol artwork which is closely tied to Huichol rituals and religion. Motives of Huichol art turned out to be witness testimonies of communication with gods. Huichol artists are therefore intermediaries between gods, and their artwork a carrier of Huichol mosaic. Communication with gods is to Huichol artists a crucial source of inspiration and their artwork then a testimony of it, which is especially true in connection with traditional ritual artwork. In the process of creating ritual artwork, tradition (*el costumbre*) is strictly observed while in the process of creating articles for commercial purposes it is often not. With the rise of interest in Huichol artwork in the past few years, selling artwork has become an essential source of income for Huichol. The growing demand has thus interrupted the „right“ traditional way of creating Huichol artwork.

My thesis suggests that Huichol tradition is very much alive up till today and it is continually recreated into an art form, or rather into a form of artwork itself, which carries the message of several generations of one whole Indian culture.