

AMERICAN GRANTEE REPORT FORM
(Fulbright-Hays Act)

Part II. PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Home Institution: **Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon 97128**
Period of Grant: **July 22, 1994-January 22, 1995**
Category of Grant: **Lecture/Research**
Host Institution: **University of Costa Rica at San Ramón**
Host Country: **Costa Rica**
Specialization: **Art and Anthropology**
Project Title: ***Research in concepts of art among indigenous peoples of Central America resulting an ethnographic mural and interdisciplinary lectures at the University of Costa Rica at San Ramón.***

1. Description of study, research, teaching and lecturing assignment: My project, as originally proposed, includes field research among various indigenous peoples and a related ethnographic mural to be painted at Sede Occidente de la Universidad de Costa Rica en San Ramón. The main objectives of the project have been engaged and/or completed, though much remains to be done in terms of publications. I am staying for several months beyond the grant period to attend to writing and local publishing with my Costa Rican collaborator. We are currently combining text and imagery for a rather lengthy bilingual publication.

Results of project:

- I have been involved in field study and documentation of Guaymí indigenous art forms, specifically painted mastate (bark). Two related articles are to be published in the Costa Rican cultural magazine Clasica this fall. The first was published in October, the second is scheduled to be published in December. The same articles are being sent to Spain through a relationship between Clasica and a magazine called Ritmo. (see further notes below) I am curating a large educational exhibition of painted mastate at Instituto Goethe in San José, which will run from Oct. 10 to the end of November. My collaborator and I will be presenting video and discussing the study on three occasions during the show. This Guaymí study is but one aspect of what I project for the year. We are currently working on something similar with Boruca, Terraba, Maleku, Cabecar and Bribri art forms.
- Field work with the Maleku-Guatuso has progressed well. My colleague and I have good contacts and have taken high quality video and photographic documentation, including songs and legends I am attending to several Maleku art forms, particularly the carved gourds, arrows, lances and bark cloth, though the carved gourds seem the most promising from the point of view of my project goals. As in the previous study of Guaymí mastate, I am interested in the subtle changes in the cultural notions of art and technical changes in

graphic conventions in their imagery. I expect to connect this study with other groups who practice carving jicara gourds, and expect to exhibit it mid-1995 at Instituto Goethe.

- I have completed a 450 square foot ethnographic mural in the entryway of the library of the University of Costa Rica at San Ramón entitled *El otro yo; una metáfora panamericana*, dedicated in a ceremony the 11th of November. The University is publishing a catalog for the inauguration and I am writing a guide to imagery to be given to the library for future reference which is being printed in Herencia, a university publication. I have given a radio interview about my work there, have meet with students several times and am invited to visit more classes later. A videotape is being produced about the several murals in San Ramón, including mine.
- Adequacy of research facilities: I have found the collection of relevant books and articles I brought with me to be superior to that which is available at the University. I knew this in advance and so spent considerable time in the States before leaving doing computer searches of archives (via Internet) and copying pertinent articles. I have been enjoying access to the Internet and e-mail by modem from home via UCR's system (permission required, but not hard to get). It has made it possible to exchange information with my home institution, colleagues, and U.S. scholars.

2. Objectives, innovation: Though I have much more to do, I have been able to accomplish exactly what I had planned plus some additional side projects that have cropped-up, such as curating the exhibition at Instituto Goethe and publishing two articles. From the responses of students and faculty to the mural project, I am certain that ideas I have been weaving together are considered stimulating and innovative. Being an artist and field researcher at the same time has, I think, illustrated the possibility of enriching the artistic enterprise through attending to indigenous cultures, and at the same time being an artist has given me confidence dealing with matters of indigenous aesthetics and praxis that anthropologists rarely deal with in depth.

3. Professional relationships: My relationship with my main collaborator, former dean of Fine Art of UCR and noted ethnomusicologist Lic. Jorge Luis Acevedo, is warm and supportive. He is constantly looking for new ways to bring our work to the public as well as tirelessly searching for and cultivating contacts among the indigenous people. With respect the field work, any achievements I have made would truly be impossible without his support and participation.

The faculty of Arts and Letters in San Ramón has been gracious and helpful in all respects, as has the staff at the library where I have been working on the mural. Dr. Eliam Campos, director of the Sede Occidente, has been warm and supportive. Herberth Zamora, artist and head of Arts and Letters, and Esteban Coto, artist and professor, have been especially helpful in offering artistic critiques of the mural-in-progress as well as having coordinated logistical support, ladders, lighting, etc. I value their judgment and have learned a great deal by going to lunch with small groups of professors where topics range from curriculum to tendencies in Costa Rican art, culture, and politics. Biology professor Rodolfo Ortiz generously offered me a room in his San Ramón home during the execution of the mural, and has provided yet another point of contact.

4. Cultural adjustments: My original project description and the formal institutional invitation I received was to paint a mural in the entryway of Museo San Ramón however, sudden (though clearly foreseeable) circumstances required that the project be moved elsewhere just as I was to begin. All of this was disturbing and disappointing at first, but the alternative was, in the end,

very satisfactory. This is but one example of the kind of last minute changes one must expect. My Costa Rican friend and main collaborator insists that such improvisation is key to understanding the tico sense of freedom, and that we gringos are, by comparison, hopelessly cuadrados! Planning is best understood (in this cultural context) as an idea rather than a solid course of action. An appointment is a loose possibility; breaking it is not a social faux pas, nor a cause to apologize. Any excuse is sufficient, such as describing a long chain of other people's contribution to the delay, the bus...or traffic, if it is acknowledged at all! All of this frustrates some ticos as well as foreigners, but such attitudes are at the heart of a culture in which efficiency is valued less than preserving the dignity of the individual and a relaxed idiosyncratic way of life. Oddly, I do manage to get a great deal accomplished, though to a very different rhythm. One must simply be patient and always carry a book or have a back-up plan.

Even though my wife is Costa Rican, and I have had considerable time to observe the culture, I still marvel at the frequency with which I am surprised at the difference between what seems imminent and what actually comes to pass, and I continue to struggle to accept delays and last minute changes of plans, and the famous hora tica, which paradoxically both aggravates and provides a relaxed pace of life.

My Spanish is serviceable if not grammatically perfect, still some idiomatic phrases and word usage throws me momentarily. (I first learned Spanish in Mexico, and so have a better ear for that accent and linguistic rhythm.) Still, I can joke and discuss politics (always good for a passionate exchange), conduct research and read the paper and academic publications nearly as fast in Spanish as English. I recommend that future grantees make it a point to read one of the major papers every day to improve language skills and at the same time gain topical material for social banter, which is the royal road to friendship here as elsewhere.

5. Public presentations:

- A lengthy referenced artist statement regarding my mural entitled El Otro Yo; una metáfora panamericana in Herencia of the University of Costa Rica (spring issue).
- Three articles for the Costa Rican cultural magazine Clasica about indigenous art and one about my new mural in San Ramón. (Possible publication of the same articles in Ritmo in Spain.)
- 400 square foot public mural in the entryway of the library of the University of Costa Rica at San Ramón. Helped produce color catalog for the inauguration. Newspaper articles about mural:
 - La Prensa Libre, 5/11/94
 - La Nación, Nov. 11 Mural en San Ramón
 - Radio interview concerning mural project for the radio station of the University extension in San Ramón.
- Curate exhibition of indigenous art at Instituto Goethe. Presented related videotape. Produced color catalog. Newspaper articles about the exhibit:
 - La Prensa Libre, 7/10/94. Pintura Guaymí sobre mastate en el Instituto Goethe.
 - La Nación, 8/10/94. Pintura arborícola.

6. Personal and professional value of project: The opportunity to paint another ethnographic mural resulted in my best effort to date. This is my third major mural, the second in Costa Rica, and the most interpretive and plastically integrated with my normal studio work. Doing a mural in public also affords a chance to interact with a wide variety of people who amble past, many of

whom offer comments and suggestions in an informal context. Judging from the response, I am certain that my mural work and related public and academic presentations have provoked discussions of the role of art within cultures and the validity of a foreigner contributing a major work of art in the spirit of international understanding and education. Students and faculty are constantly stopping by while I paint to ask a question or to offer observations. I believe some people are impressed that a foreigner is interested in local indigenous cultures—cultures which are often denigrated, denied acknowledgment or ignored, as are U.S. indigenous cultures.

Recent field work among the Guaymí indigenous people was a continuation of a study started eight years ago, but it has provided a chance to focus on a single art form and document its transformation from a craft into a fine art, all of which raised many difficult questions about social-cultural dynamics, and about which I shall write more in the future.

7. Suggestions: I have included such remarks in the body of the text above. The research experience has been enriching personally and professionally. Time away from the routine of academic life has been invigorating and healthy. I shall return to my usual teaching duties with a deeper appreciation for other cultures and ways of thinking. I am sure that acquaintances I have developed related to the project will remain valued friends for many years.

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