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Molas: Dress, Identity, Culture by Diana Marks, University of New Mexico Press, 2016. 288 pp., notes, references, index.

Mònica Martínez Mauri
Universitat de Barcelona

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***Molas: Dress, Identity, Culture* by Diana Marks, University of New Mexico Press, 2016. 288 pp., notes, references, index.**

Mònica Martínez Mauri

Universitat de Barcelona

martinezmauri@ub.edu

SPAIN

This book is the result of a woman's fascination with *molas* (indigenous Guna hand-sewn textiles produced in Panama and Colombia) and a passion that has led her to visit some of the most important collections of molas in the world. This work is a good example of the globalization of the colorful mola, an indigenous textile art that has achieved great popularity among collectors and curators worldwide. Globalization also explains why the author of this magnificent volume learned to sew molas in Japan and Panama City. Surely in Gunayala (Panama's largest Guna territory, also known as Kuna Yala or San Blas) it would have been much more difficult for her to access this knowledge since Guna (also *Kuna*) women are forbidden by their elders to teach the art of sewing molas to foreign women. Importantly, Marks' volume is itself an example of globalization since she visited collections across the world in the National Museum of the American Indian (Washington), National Museum of Natural History (Washington), Field Museum (Chicago), Denison Museum (Ohio), Logan Museum of Anthropology (Wisconsin) and Ethnologisches Museum (Berlin). The result is a reference on a striking element of Guna material culture.

Marks' visual analysis of molas collected by external agents between 1906 and 2007 would not have been possible without the efforts of the museums she visited and she praises their function of preserving Guna material culture. The reflections contained in the work under review derive exclusively from analysis of objects museified by external agents and not from garments that have been observed in situ during ethnographic fieldwork. This fact conditions the author's interpretation, especially if one takes into account that most of the collections consulted are accompanied by little documentation and few details are provided to contextualize the textile pieces studied. The result is a book on indigenous aesthetics rather than an exposition on indigenous ideas about the mola.

The book has two distinct parts. The first is dedicated to "the origin of the mola" and the second to "the role of the mola in supporting the cultural survival of Guna people." The section on the mola's origins comprises three chapters. The first tells the story of how, during the colonial period, Guna obtained the necessary fabrics through exchange and trade to make the first molas. Marks points out that their origin may be related to aesthetics in geometric body painting used by the Guna in the past. Marks suggests that if colors used in body paintings were employed in the first molas such a similar color scheme would constitute evidence for such an origin. In the Second Chapter Marks explains how "the cloth was transformed and how the mola blouse came into being on the achievement of cultural authentication." In this chapter she makes evident that while Guna men adopted the dress of whites, the women adopted clothes that allowed them to mark "distinctiveness to outsiders." In Chapter Three, Marks carried out a visual analysis to understand how the mola appears when it is worn as part of the Guna woman's dress ensemble. Using the photographic record she noted how the patterns of the Guna wrap skirts and head scarves have been modified and the width of a mola panel has decreased gradually over time.

The next three chapters investigate possible reasons for the persistence of the mola. Chapter Four explores the process of sewing molas and the time devoted to sewing it. The following chapter addresses the encouragement and support of the whole Guna society for the sewing of molas and the satisfaction Guna women gain from it. Finally, the last chapter concludes that the wearing of the mola is linked to the well-being of the Guna nation. This last reflection is accompanied by a presentation of previous ethnographic works, mostly from the English or American academy, which analyze the Guna strategies for ethnic survival, the

impact of the 1925 Dule Revolution on Guna identity, the concept of *islamiento* (Chernela, 2011), and ritual events and tourism as sources of identity reinforcement.

The text concludes with a timid call for collaborative research between museums and indigenous communities, which is undoubtedly of great interest for the future of research on indigenous material culture (Kraus, Halbmayer and Kummels 2018). This approach was used by one of the museums in which Marks worked, the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin in connection with the project “Objects as witnesses of cultural contact—intercultural perspectives of the history and present of the indigenous populations of the upper Rio Negro (Brazil/Colombia),” also includes projects developed by the Pitt Rivers Museum and The Field Museum in Chicago. Workshops aimed at opening new avenues of cross-cultural cooperation are necessary to generate new knowledge about artefacts that, thanks to collectors and scientists, have become “ethnographic” objects. If the producers of these objects—that are often not mere objects but beings with agency and subjectivity (*cf.* Santos Granero 2009)—could shed light on the multidimensional meanings of the objects conserved in museums it would be possible to go beyond visual analysis and complement many of the interpretations that scholars have made of the mola and its use.

The volume concludes with two appendices, one dedicated to mola sewing terms and techniques while the other describes the rationale underlying the author’s reference collection of 247 molas from museum collections that allow us to understand the more technical aspects of Marks’ research.

This book gives continuity to the works on molas initiated by authors such as Mari Lyn Salvador (1997), Michel Perrin (1998), Edith Crouch (2011) and Pedro Uriel Sánchez Zárte (2015). Such works are characterized by an ethnoaesthetics approach to the mola world. They are illustrated with hundreds of color photographs that delight the Guna women of the islands of Gunayala. This past August when I arrived at Gardi Sugdub Island with Marks’ book under my arm it immediately aroused the interest of my hosts. The molas reproduced in this book were not only observed with attention by the women of the islands but also copied and used as inspiration for those to come. Perhaps in the near future we should also ask ourselves about the effects of these kinds of publications on the reality they try to understand.

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