

Arts and Crafts: Cultural Expression of a People

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Baskets such as this *balaio tinté* are for sale in Socupira market in the capital city of Praia, Santiago.

Photo by Diana N'Diaye



Marcelino Santos, working at the National Crafts Center in Mindelo, S. Vicente, is weaving *pano d'obra*, the most elaborate of the traditional Cape Verdean *panos*.

Photo by Pete Reiniger

MARIA ESTRELA is a researcher in traditional crafts and the Director of *Atelier Mar*, an institution in Mindelo that carries out research, training, collection, publication, and exhibition of traditional crafts and produces ceramic ware for daily use.

Craftsmanship is the art of living; it is linked to our cultural identity. We find the social values that characterize Cape Verdeans in the solidarity expressed in *djunta mom*, "the spirit of joining hands," at the time of house building, and in the aesthetic values of materials collected from the land. Traditional crafts preserve the precarious environmental balance in our developing society, in which irrational construction practices and the use of imported raw materials aggressively strive for dominance. Industrially produced consumer goods injure the aesthetic as well as the natural environment of the islands. In agriculture, important values of cultural and biological craftsmanship are

preserved and practiced all over the archipelago in the species cultivated, in the methods of cultivation used, and in the ways of preparing foods, sometimes according to ancient rituals.

Our crafts embody modes of cultural expression and exchange. Foods, basketry, ceramics, tin work, and musical instruments are a means of cultural affirmation. They are points where people come in contact with their deepest and most authentic values. In this archipelago of rocks and winds, forever dependent on uncertain rains, peopled by the encounter of African and European cultures, popular art is revitalized by the products of a craftsmanship rooted in tradition.