



The Nature of Culture

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Translated by Carlos I. Díaz



Life in the six featured cultural ecosystems and metropolitan areas, from left top and clockwise: A Southeastern Plains sunset; an Amazonian Uitoto basket maker; *joropo* dancers from the Plains; traveling down the Magdalena River in the Momposino Depression; Circo Ciudad street performance in Bogotá; Juan César Bonilla carving a *tagua* seed in the Andean Highlands; and Alexis Rentería playing the saxhorn in a Pacific Rainforest *chirimía* band. Right side: *Guadua* architecture in the Coffee Region, and Andean Highlands weaver Lolita Russi knitting with wool.

Photos by Villegas Editores, Fernando Urbina Rangel, Circo Ciudad, Carlos Mario Lema, Cristina Díaz-Carrera/Smithsonian Institution, Carlos Mario Lema, Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia, and René Montero Serrano.



Colombia is located in a strategically important corner of South America between the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. From south to north, the



Andean chain ascends from Chile and opens into an impressive triple range of high mountains interspersed by two valleys. From coast to coast, extensive lowlands stretch towards the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, into the broad eastern plains, and the Amazonian rainforest. Over time, its inhabitants have adapted to these natural highland and lowland environments, transforming them in a variety of ways in order to ensure their survival. As they grapple with the challenges posed by the rugged geography; the effects of an earlier economic development strategy based on mineral extraction, export, and depletion of natural resources; and the violence from warring factions that represent clashing national and international interests, Colombians have shown profound resilience and creativity in forging a rich cultural heritage of skills and knowledge, memories and traditions, religious faith and dreams that provide the ground for a better world for their children.

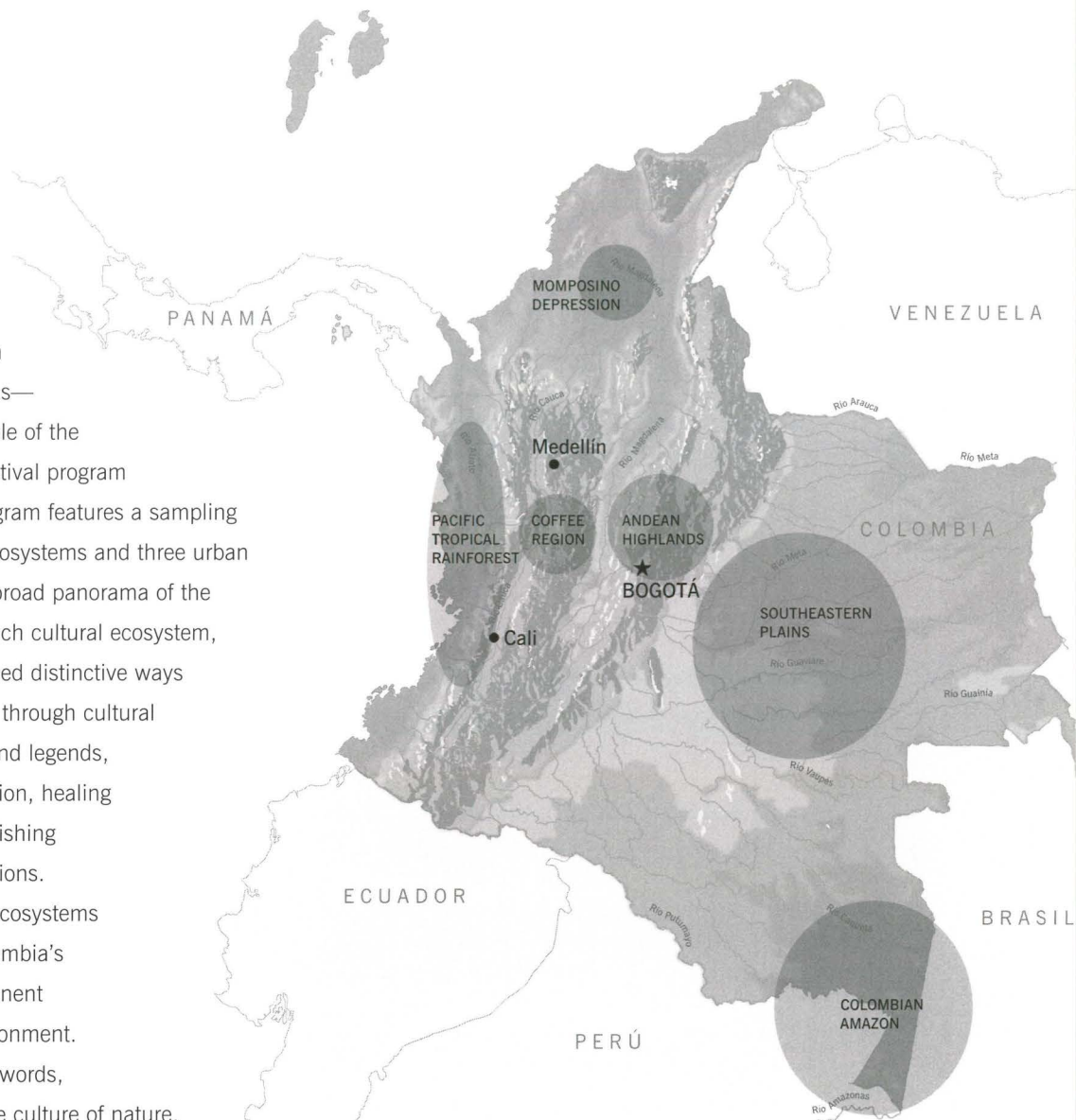
The resulting symbiosis of culture and nature—the rich and diverse cultural ecosystems—provides the organizing principle of the 2011 Smithsonian Folklife Festival program on Colombia. The Festival program features a sampling of these traditions in the six ecosystems and three urban contexts that form part of the broad panorama of the country's cultural nature. In each cultural ecosystem, local populations have developed distinctive ways of managing natural resources through cultural practices that include stories and legends, song and dance, food preparation, healing practices, craft-making skills, fishing techniques, and building traditions. As our journey through these ecosystems shows, transformations in Colombia's cultural traditions are in permanent dialogue with the natural environment. The nature of culture, in other words, derives from Colombia's unique culture of nature.

AN ITINERARY FOR THE JOURNEY

Our journey takes us through Colombia's highlands and lowlands, over the three branches of the Andes mountain range with its inter-Andean valleys, across the broad savannahs, and into the forests and jungles—all geographically and culturally connected by an extensive network of rivers and roads. The journey begins at elevations above 8,500 feet in the Andean Highlands of the eastern mountain range, which is inhabited primarily by rural people whose culture reflects their indigenous ancestry. Descending into the valley of the Magdalena River and the central mountain range, we travel through the Coffee Region, home to people who migrated to the area in the 1800s when the coffee industry emerged. Heading north to the Momposino Depression, we come to the lowlands of the Magdalena River, the cradle of the country's Caribbean culture. Crossing a third mountain range, we enter the Pacific Rainforest on the western part of the country, predominantly inhabited by people

of African descent. A long journey to the east through the Southeastern Plains takes us to the ranching cultural frontier shared with neighboring Venezuela. Finally, we enter into the Amazonian Tropical Rainforest where we explore a richly biodiverse region inhabited by diverse indigenous communities.

The points at which these ecosystems intersect are in the three principal urban centers of Colombia—Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. Since 1950, Colombians have migrated in large numbers from the countryside to these cities, which currently house over twelve million people. They come in search of better education, health, housing, and employment opportunities. The central urban hubs thus provide ideal spaces within which to examine the transformation of Colombian culture, which, until recently, was primarily rural. Cities are the modern setting for new forms of life, for the many informal occupations and dynamic work opportunities that become necessary and possible in the urban jungle.



Beginning Our Journey: The Highlands

ALONG THE ANDEAN HIGHLANDS OF CUNDINAMARCA AND BOYACÁ

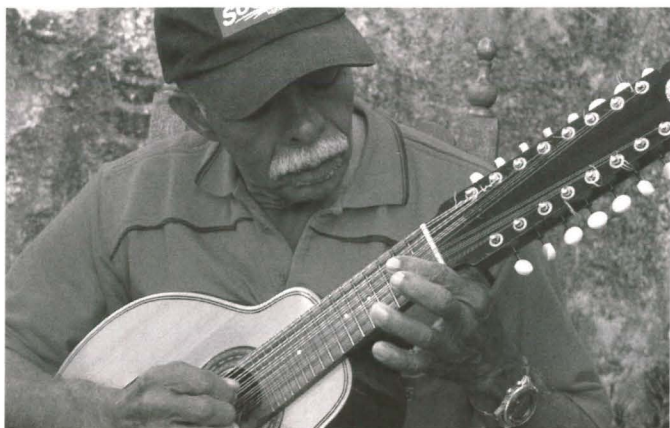
Up in the highlands of Cundinamarca and Boyacá in the eastern range of the Andes, we find the largest, most populous, and most diverse region of the country. During the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, colonizers founded settlements on land originally inhabited by indigenous peoples. Most of these lands became the property of the Spanish settlers, who subdivided them into large holdings and began to cultivate vegetables, fruit trees, medicinal herbs, and tubers, such as potatoes, both as cash crops and for local consumption. In the twentieth century, these estates were subdivided into smaller plots and their ownership was transferred to farming families. Current Highland residents combine agriculture with animal husbandry, grazing, and craft-making, especially textiles and pottery, all of which form part of a long history of interaction with the environment and are founded on extensive indigenous memory and tradition. They apply this traditional knowledge to such activities as the cultivation of *fique* (related to sisal) and work with other fibers such as *esparto* (needle grass) and *palmiche* palm that go into fishing nets, ropes, espadrilles, hammocks, shoulder bags, baskets, and objects for domestic or ceremonial use. Today, artisans continue traditional practices adapted to new needs. Flor Alba who lives in Fúquene, a village and lake where the *junco* (type of water reed) grows, recalls her experience: "When I was eight, my grandmother would sit me down to weave small pieces for a *junco* mat. Later, they started to make baskets, and we continue to innovate."

This dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation is also evident in other artistic and cultural traditions of this region. It shows in the art of Rosa Jeréz, the daughter of a renowned potter from Ráquira, a pottery

village rich in clay soil. Her mother first taught her how to work the clay and how to make clay pots. But Rosa rebelled, perhaps inspired, as she says, by the gods. Full of originality and symbolism, her sculptures of virgins, saints, and churches boldly reinterpret Catholic iconography in ways that would have made an artist like Antoni Gaudí proud. Similar dynamics underlie the arts related to the *tagua* palm, which is native to the rainforests of the Pacific and the Magdalena River but was later brought to the Highlands, where it has been used in Boyacá for more than 100 years. Craftsman Juan César Bonilla, who carves delicate miniatures from the seed of the *tagua* palm, never ceases to innovate within this tradition: "I am third generation; I transform my father's craft, and explore the possibilities of the *tagua*." These and other cultural products of this ecosystem can be found in the Highlands market, one of the most important spaces for symbolic, social, and material exchange in the Andean Highlands, where people from the surrounding areas congregate to sell and buy produce and traditional crafts.

Alba Beltrán and her son Andrés Merchán gather *palmiche* fiber for making the *tapia pisada* hats. Photo by René Montero Serrano





THE COFFEE REGION: CULTURE AND TRANSPORTATION IN A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE

Our journey continues as we descend into the valley of the Magdalena River and climb into the central mountain range and into the Coffee Region. Since the mid-1800s, settlers have colonized this vast territory—predominantly an Andean tropical forest characterized by richly biodiverse steep slopes and river networks—seeking new forms of livelihood founded on corn and a coffee-growing export economy.

A favorable climate, volcanic soils, and optimal weather conditions make this ecosystem well suited for growing coffee. The coffee industry's largely manual process of cultivation and production enables entire families to participate in this work that sustains the rural economy. An associated culture that integrates work, housing, transportation, and foodways focuses a vigorous sense of identity and has gained national and international renown. As José Alexander Salazar testifies, "Coffee becomes part of one's culture. It is what we have known growing up, and what we have lived with. It is what has fed us and dressed us. What I am I owe partly to coffee, to my father, a coffee farmer. That is also part of me."

Basketmaking is closely related to this coffee culture, where it has been traditionally used for the harvest, transportation and processing of coffee. Ofelia Marín explains, "Money hangs on the trees in the mountains. That's what we say, because when we have no work, or anything, we go to the forest to cut vines to sell to those of us who weave." Interestingly, after the introduction of plastic baskets in recent years, many coffee basketmakers have now diversified their work to make utilitarian and decorative pieces for the larger craft market.

Similarly, mule-driving and jeep-hauling occupations provide transportation for merchandise, including coffee



(Left) Elkin de Jesús Meneses, musician with Aires del Campo from the Coffee Region, plays a *bandola* guitar. Photo by Germán Ferro

(Right) A mule driver leads pack mules up the path in the Coffee Region. Photo by Villegas Editores

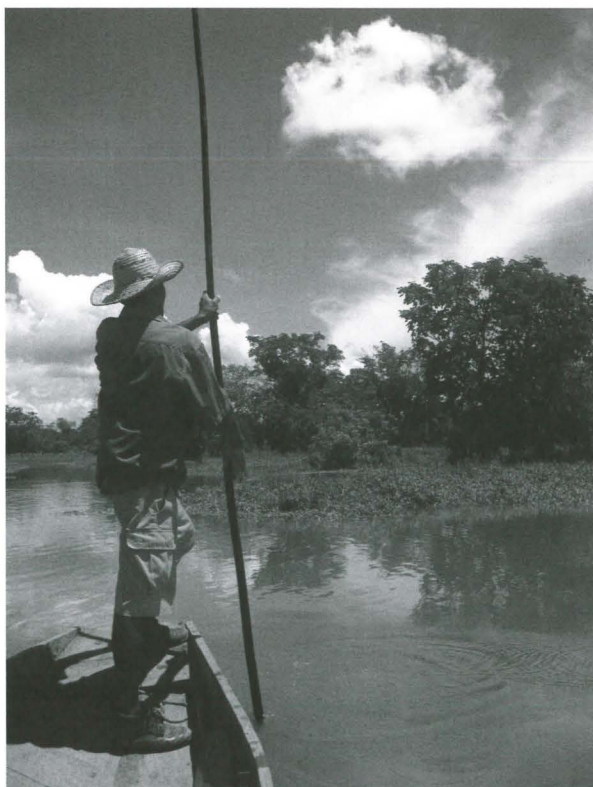
products, through the dirt paths and rough roads in the high Andes Mountains. Since the mid-twentieth century, mules began to be replaced by Willys Jeeps, which were originally manufactured in the United States during World War II and afterward extensively exported to developing countries, particularly those with expanding agricultural sectors. In Colombia, the first jeeps arrived in 1950 and became known locally as *yipao*, and their drivers as *yiperos*. The word *yipao* is now also used as a unit of measure, for example, a *yipao* of coffee, a *yipao* of bananas, a *yipao* of people. Mule-driving and *yipao* helped to expand commerce, facilitate communication, promote economic growth, and facilitate the export of coffee. More than just transportation, they are cultural symbols of the region. In the words of *yipero* Jhon Jairo Amortegui, "The *yipe* is in your blood, just as much as your family. You learn to love your Willys Jeep like you love your own brother."

Finally, the *guadua* (*angustifolia* Kunth) is a native bamboo species of the Andean forest that occupies a prominent place in both the landscape and the culture of the area. Its strength, durability, and flexibility make it so useful that it is commonly referred to as "vegetable steel." Inhabitants have become extremely creative in their use of *guadua*, often employing it as a natural alternative to concrete and steel. Their applications include home construction, furniture, appliances, and decorative objects. The use of *guadua* has increased greatly with new building construction technologies relying on its extraordinary properties. The creative structures that house the Colombia Festival program make full use of these innovations.

The Journey to the Lowlands

THE MOMPOSINO DEPRESSION: HYBRID AMPHIBIOUS CULTURES

Traveling north on the Magdalena River, our journey takes us next to the Momposino Depression in the Caribbean region, located at the mouths of the Cauca, San Jorge, Cesar, and lower Magdalena rivers. This floodplain of beaches, islets, and higher lands, located below sea-level, is periodically bathed by the rising waters of streams and marshes. The rich rainforest teems with diverse birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles, such as alligators, all of which feature predominantly in the legends, myths, and carnival dances of the region. This



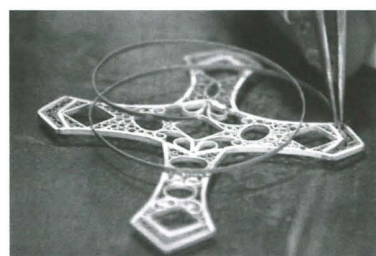
floodplain is characterized by the coexistence of different cultural traditions, occupations, foodways, music, and architecture. These can be traced from the first indigenous inhabitants to the enslaved African populations who arrived with the increased use of the Magdalena River beginning in the seventeenth century, and to the Spanish and Creole colonial society, which created urban centers dominated by the Catholic Church and its traditions.

The Villa de Santa Cruz de Mompox, built on the banks of the Magdalena River in the fifteenth century, has been the place where people come together to market, sell, or trade goods from Europe, Cartagena, the Caribbean, and Santa Fe de Bogotá. Because gold and silver from the mines were received and consolidated in Mompox as legal tender in the payment of royal taxes, they fostered the development of noted silversmiths and goldsmiths who produced delicate, hand-woven filigree from extremely fine strands of the precious metals. The families of these master craftsmen have handed down their traditions from generation to generation, continuing into the present time.

(Left) A man takes a canoe down the Magdalena River.

Photo by Juanita García Caro

(Below) A Mompox jeweler works on the fine details of a filigree cross. Photo by Antonio Castañeda Buragila, LetrArte Editores





In Mompox, the annual observance of Holy Week, which commemorates the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, features richly detailed religious images carved in wood from local trees using techniques developed in the colonial era. Tobías Herrera, who is carrying on the craft he and his brother learned from their father, comments, "One strives to make everything better, to make a more beautiful sculpture, and to explore inwardly what is in the artist's soul."

The Caribbean region's dances, songs, and carnival celebrations originate in riverside towns that dot the plains. The prevailing musical forms are the *tambora* and the *chandé*, their lyrics steeped in the events of daily life and the traditional occupations in these river towns. Many of the folkloric dance forms can be seen at the Barranquilla Carnival, the most notable being *farotas* and *pilanderas*. These dances are based on themes of resistance by the indigenous and African-descended people in the face of abuse of their women by the Spanish colonizers. Along the Magdalena River, it is customary for *farotas* and *pilanderas* to announce the arrival of carnival every year at the break of dawn on January 20.

PACIFIC TROPICAL RAINFOREST: RAIN, GOLD, AND BIODIVERSITY

West of the highlands and along the Pacific Coast, our journey continues to the Pacific Tropical Rainforest. The high western range of the Andes geographically isolates this ecosystem from the rest of the country. Among the most biologically diverse places on the planet, it is a fragile environment threatened by the intensive extraction and exploitation of its timber, minerals, and river fish. Rivers are at the center of everyday life in this region, and provide the crossroads for all economic, religious, and cultural activities. Rivers of life and death, rivers of communication, sacred rivers, festive rivers, rivers of fish and gold, rivers of identity—they are considered both the source of life, as well as the site of cultural exchange in the ecosystem.

As a consequence, fishing, which provides an important source of protein in the local diet, is a tremendously important activity and a major economic resource of the region. Boys learn from an early age to make canoes, oars, fishing rods, nets, and other implements, and to identify and recognize the species of fish that become abundant in different seasons. In winter, when the rivers rise, local

(Above) Tobías Herrera carves a Christ figure in his workshop. Photo by Juanita García Caro

(Right) Masked dancers parade during carnival. Photo by Fernando Urbina Rangel





fishermen use *atarrayas*, or handwoven nets, to trap large quantities of fish. To the fishermen, the river is life itself; the place for sustainable livelihoods; the place for personal hygiene and domestic activities. Men and women also gather wood in the forest to make *rayos* (washboards) for scrubbing clothes, and pans to search for gold in the rivers and streams. Washing in the river is a group activity that provides opportunities for socializing and strengthening the bonds of community. Usually every woman owns her own *rayo* on which she can wash her own family's clothes as well as those of others to generate additional income.

Since river beds are rich in mineral deposits—gold, platinum, chromium, and copper—inhabitants of this region have also engaged for more than four centuries in the mining and selling of mineral ores, and in jewelry-making. In the pre-Hispanic era, they mined gold to fashion into ceremonial and decorative objects. During the colonial period, the Spanish extensively extracted and commercialized gold using indigenous and enslaved African labor. This set the stage for the predominance in the Pacific region of peoples of African descent, who attained their freedom in 1851. Mining continues to be a major source of income for families who have developed a variety of specialized tools and techniques for gold panning. Building on sophisticated metal-working techniques that date back to pre-Hispanic times as well as old European traditions, gold- and silversmiths create pieces today that combine this legacy with cutting-edge contemporary designs.

The symbiosis between river and jungle has generated a rich source of life experiences and sounds that are expressed in rhythms, cadences, and oral traditions. Leonidas Valencia, director of the *chirimía* musical group La Contundencia explains, "What we express with our instruments is nostalgia, and sometimes joy; but also

(Left) Vendors sell bananas off boats on the banks of the Atrato River. Photo by Villegas Editors

(Center) A *marimba de chonta* ensemble gets ready to play. Photo courtesy of Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección de Patrimonio

(Right) Women wash dishes on the banks of the river. Photo by Amalia Duque

much pain because we came to this land as slaves. People will express with their music their feelings and their deepest understanding of the environment we live in." The predominant styles of music and song in this region include *toques de marimba* with voice and percussion instruments: *bombos*, *cununos*, and *guasás* employed together with the *marimba de chonta* in the *currulao*, *bunde*, *juga*, *berejú* and *bambuco viejo* rhythms. Families offer prayers, make petitions, give thanks to the saints, and say goodbye to the dead, intoning *alabaos*, *gualies*, *romances*, and *alumbramientos*. These are women's songs of African and Spanish origin sung a cappella by a multi-voiced chorus responding to a lead voice. The *alabaos* and *gualies* are part of funeral rituals performed at the home of the deceased, which create occasions for the river communities to come together, and for families to entertain their guests with music, dance, and parlor games, offering them drink, food, and cigarettes.

Finally, the rivers provide settings for celebrations and processions. They are the primary means by which people travel to festivities and funeral rites. On their waters, the *balsadas* (processions of boats) carry images of the saints, such as St. Anthony or St. Francis, who sway gently to the rhythm of the water, the songs, and the prayers intoned by believers as festive expressions of renewed faith, hope, and joy: "See how lovely they float him down, with flower bouquets in adoration. Oi...Oa...San Antonio is leaving now."



THE SOUTHEASTERN PLAINS: JOURNEY TO THE EAST OF COLOMBIA

We arrive next in the Southeastern Plains, one of the world's largest river basins, an extensive territory shared by Colombia and Venezuela and framed by the Orinoco River. Andean jungles, forests along the rivers, palm groves, and grasslands dominate the landscape. In the winter, rushing rivers and numerous streams and creeks flood the plains and great savannahs. Seasonal cycles of hot and humid climate with heavy rains followed by months of drought define the work and daily routines of the local inhabitants, whose principal livelihoods are agriculture, hunting, and cattle ranching. With the ranch and the herd as the basic production units, a ranching culture has developed based on the knowledge and management of cattle and horses that includes a distinctive song tradition with lyrics for calling cattle and a foodways based on beef. The *mamona* are long cuts of veal that are slowly roasted over hot coals for many hours. Emblematic of the Plains identity and culture, the meat is served with *topocho* plantains, *yuca*, potatoes, chili peppers, and hard liquor.

Cowhide is used in fashioning many items that equip cowboys and their horses for their daily work with the herd. While the cowboys themselves were originally responsible for fashioning their own implements, tools and accessories including ropes, hats, halters, and hammocks (known as *campechanas*), full-time craftsmen are responsible for producing and furnishing these implements today. Integrally related to the region's ranching traditions, the *joropo* is ever-present in the daily lives of the people of the Plains. This music expresses, with forceful rhythms and energetic intensity, the strong character of the plains cowboy. *Joropo* refers to both the fast tempo music repertoire (known



(Left) *Joropo* singer Victor Espinel improvises a song with the accompaniment of Félix Chaparro and Carlos Rojas.

Photo by René Montero Serrano

(Right) Alvaro "Kino" Rey's bakery is famous for its *pan de arroz* (rice flour rolls), a traditional specialty of the Plains. Don Kino and his family prepare the *pan de arroz* for the brick oven. Photo by Cristina Díaz-Carrera, Smithsonian Institution

as *golpes* and *pasajes*), as well as the dance and the *parrando* (great feast) that customarily accompany the music. *Joropo* ensembles play harp and *bandola* as melodic and harmonic instruments and use the *cuatro* and *maracas* for rhythm and percussion. Different styles of *joropo* dance have evolved, but in its typical form it is danced by couples (although individual and group forms do exist), the man stamping his feet forcefully while courting his female partner, who smiles and moves gracefully with short, delicate steps.

Songs and dances about dairy ranching and milking activities are also part of the cultural universe of the plains. Dances such as *gabán*, *cachicamo*, and the *figura de la sogá* spring directly from work activities and the behavior of animals. For years, cattle-herders have sung songs that they learned from others while herding. According to Víctor "Gallo Jiro" Espinel, "It's a way to calm the herd. In the middle of the second stanza, I sing a verse and echo that of the lead herder, and it sounds very nice." He explains that when the lead herder did not sing to the cattle, he would be ridiculed in verse by his companions. While generations of families once dedicated themselves to work on cattle ranches, and thus engaged in these traditions, today they also engage in other productive activities such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, and craft-making for larger markets.



The maloca is our university, where knowledge is concentrated for managing the world.”—Daniel Matapi

THE COLOMBIAN AMAZON: EMBODIED THOUGHT AND KNOWLEDGE

Our journey continues to the far southeast of the country into the rainforest along the Amazon River basin, which covers more than a third of the entire country. The copious rain and high average temperature and humidity contribute to the growth of dense and exuberant vegetation. Most of the population here is indigenous, although a large percentage was killed and displaced when tracts of land were exploited, first for rubber extraction, and later for agriculture, ranching, and illegal crops. Presently, there are fifty-two ethnic groups who speak thirteen different languages, and live in riverine, agricultural, and urban areas.

Groups such as the Matapí, Yukuna, Nonuya, Tanimuca, Uitoto, Andoque, Upichia, and Muinane thrive here due to their extensive knowledge of the rainforest and its challenges. These groups preserve foodways based on hunting, fishing, and crop rotation strategies, and continue to practice highly symbolic ritual celebrations and traditional methods of house construction. Various communities persist in maintaining the *maloca*, or “house of the people,” which is a traditional dwelling and ritual space. Daniel Matapi explains, “The *maloca* is our university, where knowledge is concentrated for managing the world.” The inside is divided into two large spaces: the women’s realm, in the rear of the *maloca*, is the location of the hearth and all the implements associated with food preparation, such as bitter cassava, the main staple of the local diet. Gertrudis Matapi explains, “Wild cassava is extremely poisonous. If not properly prepared, the person eating it may die. As an Upichía Indian, I learned from my mother how to prepare it well. I go to the garden, and I uproot several plants. I fill my basket and carry it



(Above) A *maloca* in a Uitoto community.

(Below) A Muinane cook prepares cassava.

Photos by Fernando Urbina Rangel



home on my back. Then I peel all the cassava; I get out the grater and the earthen pot, and I grate, grate.... Cultivating the garden is very important. Without it there is no life, *malocas*, dances, or rituals." Also part of this women's world are activities linked to the land and pottery. Mothers and grandmothers pass along their knowledge to their daughters and granddaughters, teaching them the techniques of how to select, mold, and fire the clay, as well as the bark and plants that are mixed into it to ensure the best firing results.

The central space of the *maloca* is reserved for the men's world. This is the *mambeadero*, a place where men congregate, sitting on their *bancos de pensamiento*, or "thinking stools," to chew sacred coca and tobacco leaves, perform shamanic healing, and pass along their wisdom to the younger generation. The men's world is also associated with activities related to hunting, fishing, and the fabrication of traps, bows, arrows, and baskets. When young people learn basketry, they are also taught the meaning of the basket designs and colors that correspond to their ethnic identity. In addition, men make the ritual musical instruments, such as resonating canes from light balsa wood, large ceremonial flutes, *chiruros* or *capeadores* from thin *guadua*, and resonant *guayas*, or rattles, from hard seeds. The making of these instruments, the sounds and rhythms of the music, and the songs and choruses that evoke the governing spirits of the animals and nature reflect the community's knowledge and relationship with the jungle.

A ritual that features exchanges between *malocas* and the reaffirmation of human ties to the world of water is the feast of the *chontaduro*, or the Dance of the Doll, that takes place at the height of the summer season during the harvest of the *chontaduro* palm. This feast invokes the "Grandparents," the ancestors of the indigenous

groups, and the "Owners" of the animals, who are invited to share in the fruits of the community's labor—wild game, fish, crops, cassava, and especially the fermented drink, *chicha de chontaduro*. In the *chontaduro* feast, the dancers, who use ritual coca and tobacco, represent animals through songs and with masks, enacting and performing the myths of the creation of water beings.

(Above) Ceremonial masks used for the Dance of the Doll.

Photo by Javier Ortiz, Fundación GAIA

(Below) Elder Antonio Rodríguez weaves a basket with the fiber from *cumare* leaves. Photo by Fernando Urbina Rangel



Crossroads

METROPOLITAN ENVIRONMENTS: BOGOTÁ, MEDELLÍN, AND CALI

Our journey comes to an end in the cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali, which sit at the crossroads between diverse regions and ecosystems, where the rural and urban, the national and international, converge. Beginning in the twentieth century, the social, economic, and cultural vibrancy of these cities has attracted a steady stream of migrants from the rural areas seeking lifestyle and employment options not available in their farming communities. The growing interdependence between tradition and modernity evident in Colombia's cities has set in motion changes in the customs, habits, and occupations associated with daily life, giving rise to new cultural patterns. These cities have become cosmopolitan centers where one can observe the intersection of cultural, religious, and artistic trends from around the world.

Medellín, the capital city of the mountain region, is located on the central mountain range. In the eighteenth century, mule trails to reach the Magdalena River gave people access to communications with the rest of the world. Since the nineteenth century, import and export activities, particularly related to coffee production, have been at the center of intense and dynamic commercial activity. The resulting accumulation of capital permitted further industrial development earlier than in other regions, allowing the production of soft drinks, liquors, textiles, foods, and flowers. Emblematic of Medellín is the figure of the *silletero*, or flower vendor, who in the past would transport persons and small loads, but today transports and sells flowers grown in their own gardens. This flower trade, carried on in the streets of Medellín or displayed at the Feria de las Flores along with around 500 other *silleteros*, is now one of the city's most distinctive cultural markers.



Luz Moncayo and Deivi Zúñiga demonstrate Cali-style dancing to salsa music. Photo by René Montero Serrano

Medellín has developed a taste for the arts, poetry, fairs, and festivals. Traditional country music played on string instruments, the music of the local bar, and the music of the urban working-class neighborhoods, such as the tango, have become wildly popular among residents of all ages and social classes. Edinsón Vanegas and Johanna Palacios, dancers who grew up in the Manrique neighborhood, learned their craft from their parents and grandparents and embraced the spirit of this expressive tradition: "We tell a story through dance, and let people experience an entire novel in three minutes. Anyone can learn to dance the tango and become immersed in the culture of the tango; anyone is able to dance tango in their own way. The tango is a feeling."

Bogotá is a sixteenth-century city of Hispanic and Catholic traditions, located on the eastern range of the Andes, more than 600 miles from the nearest seaport. As the country's capital city, it is the hub of political and economic power, the strategic point of convergence for the vast and diverse regions of the country. Over seven million people from all corners of the nation live here, and thousands of tourists visit each year, making Bogotá a truly cosmopolitan city that represents the varied cultural, artistic, and religious traditions from around the world. One activity that ties together others in the city is linked with organized recycling and the disposal of garbage. Like all great cities, Bogotá generates tons of garbage, yet seems to have little interest in organized recycling. City residents who live at the subsistence level engage in scavenging activities, in which many have found not only a strategy for survival and stability but also a source of life lessons to be passed on.



Educator Hernando Ruiz, director of Reciclarte says, "Garbage is not garbage; garbage does not exist, and discards become art. Most discarded materials come from peoples' homes. It is about transforming discarded materials into useful objects; to create alternative research and art education opportunities, and a healthier relationship with the environment."

Cali is located on the great Cauca River in the valley between the central and western ranges of the Andes. The product of a merging rainforest, valley, and mountain cultures, and of its exposure to the rest of the world through the Pacific Ocean seaport of Buenaventura, Cali can be considered a mulatto city. This exposure allowed and encouraged the arrival of salsa, Afro-Caribbean music forged by Latin American migrants in New York City, which found immediate acceptance and became a touchstone of Cali's cultural identity. The city is now one of the centers of this vibrant, joyful musical form that has flourished among the large Afro-Caribbean and migrant populations that historically flocked to participate in the city's burgeoning industrial sector.

Many different musical traditions and styles coexist in these three urban contexts where the newer forms mix freely with older popular and classical ones. In the cities, genres such as rock, *ranchera*, tango, salsa, ballads, hip hop, jazz, classical, electronic, and tropical music intermix and incorporate the sounds and experiences of urban life.

Hernando Ruiz, director of Reciclarte, works in his workshop in Bogotá. Photo by Eloisa Lamilla Guerrero

Musical interests and leanings vary by region. For example, in Bogotá, people identify more with rock, jazz, and *ranchera* music; in Medellín, tropical and popular musics, like tango or *carrilera*; and in Cali, salsa and hip hop.

In recent decades, musicians have created new compositions inspired by regional traditional and rural music. The "fusion music" or the "new Colombian music" that has emerged out of this interaction reflects new instrumentation, innovation, and experimentation. Rock groups play rock *bambucos*, or use traditional instruments like the marimba or drums. Other groups play jazz with Andean and *llanero* *bandolas*, *cumbias* with electric guitars or other combinations of electronic instruments, and *currulaos* with instruments built from recycled materials.

Dynamic and complex, the cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali connect the diverse experiences, traditions, and regions that comprise Colombia. Older and more recent generations cultivate traditional practices, even as they adapt and transform them to suit new contexts and needs. Through their knowledge and relationships, they connect these urban centers to the life, culture, and nature of the country's different ecosystems. They place in sharp focus the interdependence that characterizes the vitality of any ecosystem—the activity and exchange required to sustain life and culture.

Garbage is not garbage; garbage does not exist, and discards become art. Most discarded materials come from peoples' homes. It is about transforming discarded materials into useful objects; to create alternative research and art education opportunities, and a healthier relationship with the environment. —Educator Hernando Ruiz, director of Reciclarte

From Colombia's major cities to its jungles, over its mountains and across its plains, along the coast and through the Coffee Region, our journey through the ecosystems has introduced us to the nature of culture in Colombia and to the development of the country's varied cultures through the interaction of its inhabitants with their natural environment. At the 2011 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, we celebrate the country's rich bio-cultural diversity. One hundred Colombian artists will sing, dance, tell stories, prepare food, and demonstrate religious ceremonies and occupational practices. Basket weavers, jewelry makers, cowboys, mule packers, jeep drivers, among others, will demonstrate the wisdom, creativity, and commitment that grows out of a profound understanding of the land one inhabits.

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