

# Fantabulous Folk Art...Mola Art



# *Let's Visit*

## San Blas de Cuna Islands

Situated in the Caribbean Sea a few miles off the north coast of Panama, the San Blas de Cuna Islands are the home of the Kuna, a traditional society of Native Americans.





These tropical islands are small and many are surrounded by coral reefs. The islands are part of Panama, but are primarily run by the Kuna tribe.



# How did the Kuna come to live on the island of San Blas?

- In 1513, Spanish explorer *Vasco de Balboa* invaded Panama.
- The Kuna fought him for the mainland.
- Around 160 years ago the Kuna escaped to San Blas Island in *cayucos*.



# Who Are the Kuna?

- Strongly knit tribal society
- Moral and matriarchal society
- Daughters are prized
- Have a tradition or ritual for every event
- Traditions are passed down orally or through molas



# A day in the life of the Kuna MEN:

- Paddle to the mainland in *cayucos* to tend their fields.
- Fish for lobsters, red snappers, swordfish, sharks, and manta ray.
- Bring home firewood and river water for the village.



# A day in the life of Kuna WOMEN:

- Perform chores
- Take care of family and animals
- Fetch water
- Cook and tend the fires in the *sokakka*
- Work on their Molas



# A day in the life of the Kuna KIDS:

- Kids go to school just like you
- Unlike the homes, schools are built of cement blocks
- Students are taught to speak and write in Spanish



# What is a Mola?

- Mola is the Kuna word for "cloth"
- In *reverse appliqué*, the women layer fabric and cut intricate patterns, exposing colors in the underlying pieces of fabric.
- Molas are sewn with almost invisible stitches.





Kuna Indian women spend many hours hand sewing these fabulous "molas" to be worn on both sides of their blouses.

- All genuine Molas are created and worn by Kuna women.
- Many hours of careful sewing are required to create a fine mola.
- Designs are always original and are an opportunity for women to express themselves and demonstrate their talent.
- The ability to make an outstanding mola is a source of status.



Why are the women so important?

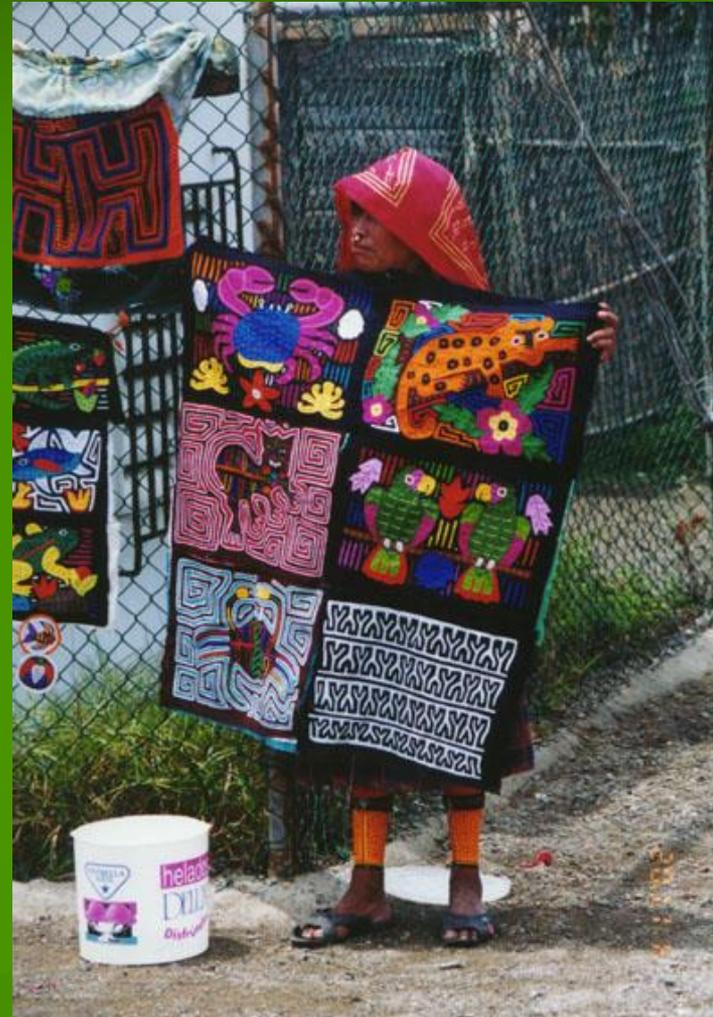
**THEY MAKE THE  
MONEY \$\$\$**



With increased tourism, the demand for *molas* has grown and has become a source of economic prosperity.

# What to do with a Mola...

- Framed as Art
- Pillows
- Place mats
- Bedspreads or Quilts



## Mola Criteria:

- Balance
- A Central Motif
- Smooth, Even, and Narrow Lines
- Nearly Invisible Stitching
- Many Layers of Fabric
- Intricate Cutouts
- Addition of Details



## Typical Mola Motifs:

- Geometric
- Mythological
- Animals or marine life
- Dominant Mola Colors:  
Red or Orange, & Black

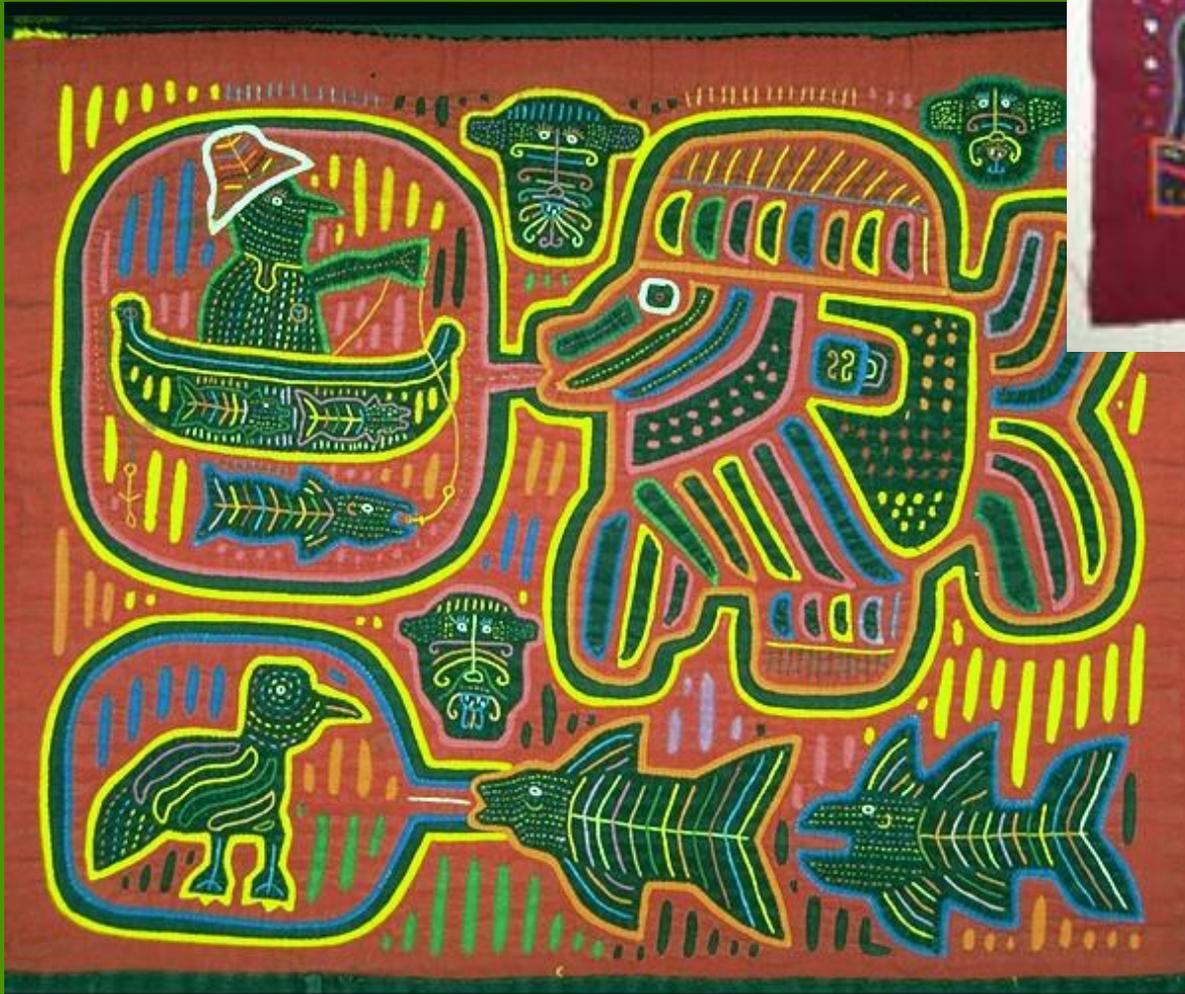
Inspired by the things they see in their everyday lives.



Parrots, storks, and turkeys live around these islands & are held in high esteem by mola makers.



Nautical themes are popular to the people living in the midst of the sea.



# Compare and Contrast

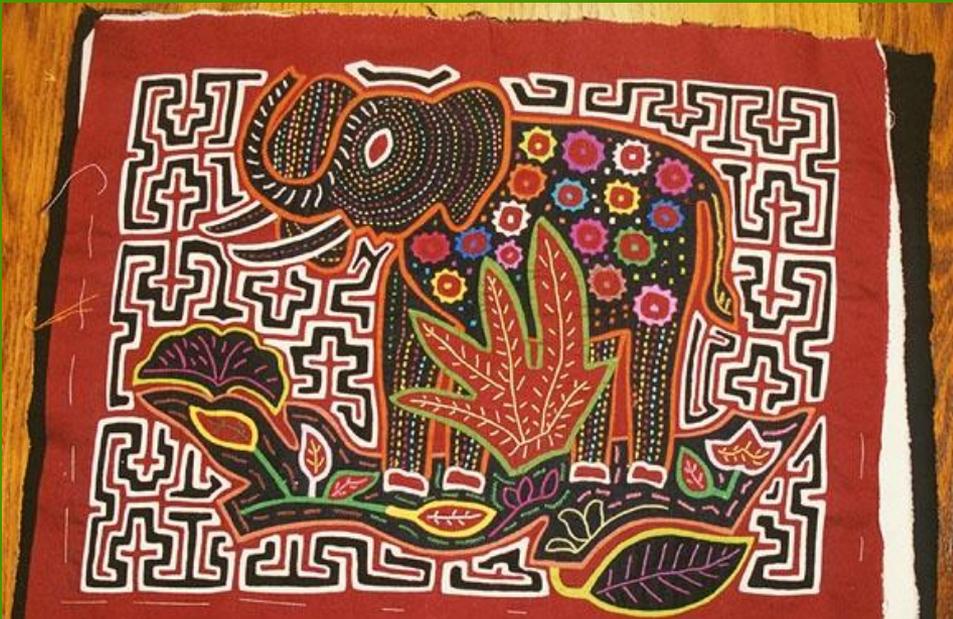
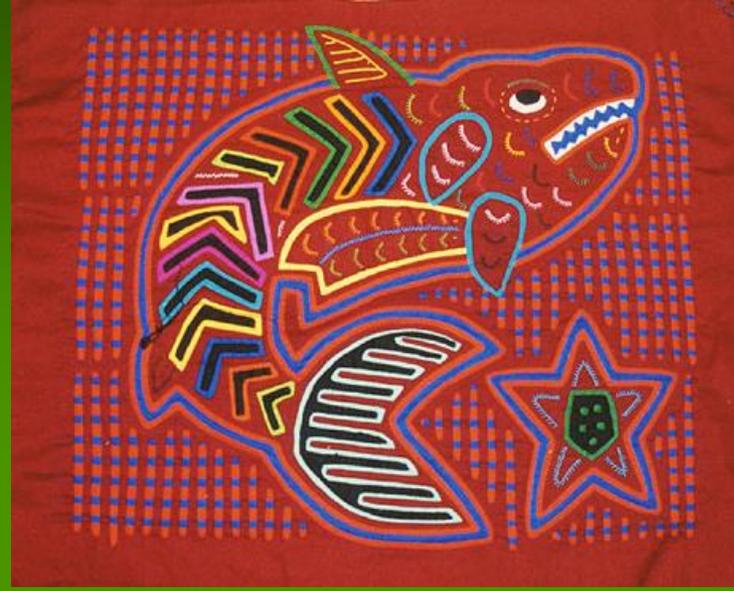
- How are these two artworks similar?
- How are they different?



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**Molas are one of the primary expressions of the visual arts in Kuna society.**

