## Chané Masks at the MAP

In this virtual tour you can appreciate 19 Chané masks belonging to our collection. They are pieces from the 20th century, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, used mainly for an ancestral agrarian ritual called *arete*, today it is mixed with the carnival.

Masks represent a distinctive feature of the art of Chané people. At the beginning of the 20th century, the commercialization of masks had little relevance. Later they began to be sought out by anthropologists in order tocollect, study, analyse as well as to also ensure their conservation.

Some of these productions began to be part of the museum's collection through the researcher Delia Millán de Palavecino, wife of the anthropologist Enrique Palavecino, who worked with him on his ethnographic trips to the *Chaco Salteño* region between 1938 and 1949. The Argentine academic was also a consultant from the museum's first Folk Art exhibition in 1949, an iconic display where these pieces were exhibited alongside other indigenous and traditional crafts. Between 1968 - 1973 Millán de Palavecino was director of the MAP.

Chané mask. Wood carved and painted with natural dyes. Former CEPAR collection. Second half of the 20th century. MAP collection.

The last acquisition of Chané masks was in the 1980s. They were purchased through the Municipal Centre for Craft Promotion CEMPAR based in the museum whose goal was to preserve and promote traditional folk heritage by making crafts and artisans visible. As part of this program, ponchos and other textiles, pottery, basketry among other quality crafts were purchased in different markets of Argentine provinces. Representative and quality productions were also bought from some recognized artisans. These pieces were intended to be sold in the museum to reinvest in new purchases.

Many of these masks were part of different exhibitions at the MAP. Thus, in 1977, Enrique Luco and Ana María Cousillas curated an exhibition showing them in an Ethnographic Room that the museum had at that time. Likewise, being Cousillas director of the MAP, Chané masks were again exhibited in "Master artisans" room (2010). Finally, they were exhibited in “Our Wood artisans” exhibition (2015) under the management of the current director, Felicitas Luna. These pieces are addressed forfirst time in their full ethnic and cultural dimension.

We invite you to start this virtual tour in which, by way of stations, you can stop at the different aspects that we address of these fascinating objects and their creators.

The research for this exhibition was carried out by the museum's interdisciplinary team, made up of Mirta Bialogorski, Camila Feal and Paola Fritz, the latter two also carrying out the curatorial work. We hope that this reading contributes to reflection, value and respect for the cultural diversity in our country.

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## Ritual use of masks

When the *taperigua* blooms in the forest, Chané people begin the celebration of the *arete*, the real festival or the real time continues until its flowers wither, about 40 days.

Formerly this agrarian ritual took place when the *abati* (root) used to make *kâwi* ("chicha" or corn beer) matured, which is the ceremonial drink.

The presence of the European man was crucialon the change of dates, making the *arete* celebration coincide with the western carnival.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the *arête* is the use of ritual masks called *aña-aña. Aña* is a word that designates both masks and dead people or their spirit.

According to the Chané worldview, even though dead people have been loved ones, the *aña* represent feared presences that should be avoided, since although they are spirits and they have a negative connotation of being "wandering souls".

“Our crafts are not just pieces of wood; they have an ancient spirit. That is why I speak to them so that they protect the families who carry them”says the mask maker, René Castro from Campo Durán, province of Salta.

The process of making a mask is part of the ritual. Men, especially the young ones, go into the forest to look for the wood with which they will carve the masks.

The *arete* is prepared with rehearsals of musical pieces by instrumental groups. The masked ones cover their head, hands and feet so that no one can recognize them. They also wear large ponchos (or at least overalls and raincoats). When the time comes, the celebration begins with instructions and harangues from the "manager" who must have oratorical skills.

The "big carnival" lasts for several days, where people dance and drink. In these dates they are wearing the *aña-tairusu* masks also called *aña-häti*, which are those that carry a higher prolongation. These, sometimes, are decorated with feathers surrounding the entire face and are called *aña-uru-rabe*. Others, on the other hand, wear a kind of visor and are called *aña-sindaro* (since it probably means soldier)

On the contrary, in the last days the "small carnival" takes place, in which animal masks and the *ndechi* or old masks are rather used. These do not have the upper extension, and they have the most realistic features: protruding eyes and additions such as beard or mustache.

On the last day, the game is increased with discards of chicha, talcum powder, water and confetti. A young man characterized as a *yagua* (jaguar) wearing just a loincloth, painted on his body with spots, with a mask or wooden claws, acts like an American tiger with agile movements.

The jaguar interacts with another masked man characterized as a bull in a fight (a mixture of dance and pantomime) whose outcome is usually the triumph of the jaguar who carries the bull on his back and presides over the group, leading it to a nearby river in which they will destroy their masks.

Taking into account the mestizo elements at the end of the celebration (such as the bull, the rodeo and other characters) and the importance of the jaguar in the indigenous peoples of America, it could be conjectured that it symbolizes the revenge that, at a symbolic level, reflects the indigenous worldview regarding the situation to which the European and Creole colonization process condemned them.

Regarding, the funeral nature of the ritual, it should be mentioned that opposed to the negative meaning of the *aña*, at the end of the *arete* the participants cry and mourn for their deceased loved ones, and this thought makes them consider their own death.

It is in this inversion and in all the licenses and guidelines that support the *arete*, that we can speak of a collective sharing among the Chané.

The association between belief and ritual practice makes sense and is founded on contact with others.

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## Craft techniques

To make their masks, Chané people use the wood of the *yuchán* or palo borracho (drunken stick tree), which they call *samou*. The search for the raw material is a task carried out by the male and the whole process is a ceremony that reflects respect for nature and its environment.

The day begins with this activity: men go into the forest very early in the morning, - sometimes they must travel several kilometers to find the right tree- and return in the afternoon. Some obtain their material quickly to continue the work at home, but others must make the first cuts in the forest so that - on their return trip - the load is not so heavy. There they overturn a large tree, peel it and cut it into slices; about 5 slices come out of each tree.

Before cutting the tree, they perform a ritual in which they ask the Pachamama for permission through prayers and offerings. They always work - and here it is another of their teachings - in total harmony with nature.

“Dumping the logs, chopping them up in the middle of the *bicherío* (full of insects and animals), with their weeds and carrying them on our shoulder for kilometersup to home is extremely exhausting and sacrificing. That is why when I was a child my father did not want me to go with him, but I 'traced' him to the mountain until I

managed to persuade him that I would not cut me with the knife, ”says Genaro López, interviewed by the National Fund for the Arts.

The tools they use are very simple: axe, machete, colored stones, leaves, *acutí* hairbrushes. Freshly cut *samou* wood is soft and easy to carve. Masks, once carved, are left to dry in the sun or indoors, near the kitchen, for about 3 to 5 days, finally they are sanded and painted.

The painting is prepared with natural pigments, extracted from the nearest affluent, such as the *Caraparí* river. The colours are taken from the stones, such as yellow, brown and red, and the pigments are extracted by rubbing. They also use coal. In order to achieve the white colour they put the snail on the embers for a few seconds. At present this task is sometimes assumed by women of the community.

The trade begins at a very early age, being children and it is passed down from generation to generation.

“When I was a child, 10 or 11 years old, I used to grab the knife and start practicing, it did not come out and it cut me, because it is difficult to learn ... it is not quick, but when I was older I've already learned, on my own, just practicing ... ” says Bernabé Díaz, another interviewed masker.

Regarding representations, they make anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. Among the more traditional zoomorphic forms are the parrot, the toucan, the dog, the deer, the mountain pig, the jaguar, the puma, the monkey and the dog. Also heads of bull, horse and goat. Likewise, they carve the human face (anthropomorphic representations), which have a particular stylization, at least in the most traditional ones. Animals are represented realistically and preview the finished knowledge of the craftsman, about their morphological characteristics. Some masks only represent the face and others are wearing *hati Ndechi* or *aña-ndechi*, a mask that represents an old man with a kind of trapezoidal cap. The *hati* (hat) has different decorative, openwork and / or painted motifs, in some cases with geometric figures among the most traditional designs, along with stylizations of phytomorphic, and representations of the sun, the moon and / or the stars.

Bernabé Díaz. Foto de MATRIA. Mercado de Artesanías Tradicionales e Innovadoras de Argentina

Each community - and each artisan - has a particular style and stamp that can be seen in the drawings, colour, fur and feathers of each mask. There their imagination and worldview are captured to represent the spirit of their ancestors and the endangered fauna.

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## Chané memory

Contingents of the *Arawak* linguistic family began at the beginning of the Christian era or even earlier, they moved from Central America, the Antilles and the Orinoco towards the south, arriving in slow migrations at Izozog, Tarija and Salta. Many groups settled along the way.

Part of this group came to Salta region and settled as an agricultural community at the foot of the Andes in Bolivia, in an extensive territory that ran from Guapay River in the north to Tarija region in the south. Some centuries later, this group would receive the name Chané.

From the end of the 15th century they were conquered and subdued by bands of Tupí-Guaraní migrants who arrived from the distant Atlantic coasts; according to

some,in pursuit of the legendary "Land without evil", and according to others looking for the fabulous trail of Inca gold.

Due to the close contact and mixture of both, it would arise those societies that, throughout the colonial centuries are known as “chiriguanos” and “chanés”, whose culture, worldview and languages are very similar. Each of these cultures conserved features, so the Chané kept their masks as their own symbol. Today the chiriguano people define themselves as guaraníes.

From the *Arawak*, they inherited elaborate agricultural techniques and fine pottery; from the *Guarani*, mainly, the language. Today the Chanés speak a dialect that is a variation of *Guaraní* language.

For at least a century, they rejected all attempts to found a religious mission on their lands up to 1946 when Chief *Acharei* de *Tuyunti* asked the missionaries of the Franciscan Missionary Center to settle one. Thus, the Mission of San Miguel Arcángel was established.

“The Franciscan came to ask for land, to build a school so that we could read, so that we could study, so that we could sign. That is why my grandmother - says an old chané woman - accepted him”.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the municipalities promoted the creation of neighbourhood centres among the communities, so that in Tuyunti a neighbourhood centre was also settled down, whose authorities were initially linked to the family of the caciques.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the struggle for land ownership was encouraged in Chané communities. This process was supported by the Franciscan church that managed the acquisition together with the community and in 1993 an official act was held in which the title to the land was handed over to the community centre.

“Throughout the time, says a Chané woman, “a Franciscan called Domingo Torre began to review the situation and to see how the community could have the title. That was in December 1993. The community gave a big party, they said: 'At last now we have our land.'

The neighborhood centre became the community centre, whose leaders are renewed every three years and whose tasks consist of addressing community problems, carrying out negotiations with the municipality and mobilizing resources for community development.

Among the Chanés, women play an important role in the social, cultural and economic life at home and community. They work in agriculture, in the commercialization of corn, cassava and pumpkin as well as in several duties outside home: work in shops, temporary paid work, teaching or nursing, among others.

Pottery has a long tradition in Chané communities and it is well-known by its ornamentation. An old Chané woman remembers: “There was a Franciscan, Father Silvio who brought clay from the lake ... He brought it in his truck for women to make jars.”

Women from Tuyunti and Campo Durán in the province of Salta, currently make pottery for sale to tourism.

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## At present

Nowadays, Chané people live in the province of Salta, keeping their identity and craft production.

In 2010 National Population Census in Argentina revealed 3,034 people who recognized themselves as Chané throughout Argentina, 1,862 live in the province of Salta.

At present, the Chanés live in Tuyunti, Ikira, Algarrobal, Campo Durán (all located in the department of San Martín, Salta province). There are also families settled in communities and towns such as Capiazuti, Coronel Cornejo and in the neighbourhoods of Orán and San Pedro. Some have migrated and live in the suburbs of big cities.

They are farmers of corn, pumpkin and beans; few can live off the land, because they don't have it. They subsist for their jobs in sugar mills, saw mills, YPF (acronym for "Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales" in English "Treasury Petroleum Fields", is a vertically integrated Argentine energy company, engaged in the exploration and production of oil and gas, and the transportation, refining, and marketing of gas and petroleum products) They are “swallow” harvesters: from the northern sugar harvest, they migrate to the Cuyo region to harvest grapes for wine, reaching Río Negro and Neuquén provinces for apple harvest. Campo Durán is today the main producer of Chané crafts, in particular wooden masks and pottery.

They keep their identity and cultural heritage. Today, some make treats with *kâwi* (chicha) and celebrate the *Arete* ritual ("the true party"), an agrarian and hunter

ritual that sometimes coincides with the carnival days, they believe in their *I`payé* (healer).

Many of them speak their language, a dialect that is a variation of Guaraní language. Franciscan missions have built houses, schools and they provided the water supply. At the same time, they have imposed their religion and culture, often denying them and forbidding their own. Since 1987 schools are bilingual.

Masks that were previously used for the *Arete* and later destroyed, are now being traded and that adds to their subsistence. They promote their works on their own by attending fairs, markets and events; also, through public programs specialized in promoting their handicrafts or in supporting native communities. There are some non-profit organizations and foundations that collaborate on specific projects. Some of these relationships are profitable and respectful of the fair price and their cultural guidelines, but in other cases, they are resellers, who take advantage of their talent and needs, as happens with many other crafts in the country, paying them a much lower price than what then they are assigned to sell on the market, and it allows them barely to survive.

Like other native communities, they go on fighting for their lands, an area surrounded by rivers and jungle where their ancestors lie and which brings together all their material and immaterial heritage. Many live on public lands not yet definitively assigned to those who were their most remote owners, claiming for their rights to be respected: the possession of the land also allows to perpetuate this know-how, so original and involving, in addition, a message of respect of the nature.

“We have suffered from the problems caused by deforestation for a long time, carried out by people or companies. They throw everything in their path, transforming our ecosystem. Every day we walk many kilometres to choose parts of trees that we can work on without damaging them and it hurts a lot to see how because of deforestation, other species are killed and nests and homes of all kind of animals are destroyed. I made this baby owl, for example - says one of the craftsmen showing a mask - when I discovered it in the field, crying, without his mother. I created and painted it to preserve its spirit,” says René Castro in an interview with Página 12 newspaper.

Bernabé Díaz, Ricardo Saravia, Rene Castro, Martín Segundo, Oscar Molina, Emilio Ovando, Juan José López, Mateo López, Leonardo Saravia, Genaro López and José Acosta are some of the masters of Campo Durán, Ikira and Tuyunti, who have learned to make masks from an early age and today teach the craftwork to new generations, promoting the culture and identity of their people.

The *mascareros* (people who make masks) were distinguished in 2019 with the Artistic Career Award by the National Fund for the Arts in the Crafts discipline.