

Basic Detail Report



"Creation of the World"

Date

1998

Primary Maker

José Benítez Sánchez

Medium

wooden board, wax, yarn (wool/acrylic)

Description

José Benítez Sánchez (Huichol/Wixárika) was a master shaman-artist and a transformative figure in Huichol art, spirituality, and activism. Born in 1938 in San Pablo,

Nayarit, he descended from a lineage of shamans and began his spiritual initiation at nine. His art, rooted in his spiritual practices, gained prominence during his apprenticeship with Ramon Medina Silva in the 1960s, the first internationally recognized Huichol yarn painter. By the 1970s, Sánchez established himself as a leading figure, opening a workshop in Tepic to train apprentices and producing work that became central to museum collections worldwide. In 1988, he helped found Zitákua, a self-governing Huichol community, serving as its first governor. Honored with numerous accolades, including Mexico's prestigious Ciencias y Artes award in 2003, he left a profound legacy until his passing in 2009. Yarn painting, or nierika in Huichol, involves pressing wool yarn into beeswax-covered boards to convey spiritual visions.

Traditionally used in ceremonial offerings, this art form expanded into a global medium in the 1950s, partly through artists like Sánchez, who transformed it into a platform for cultural preservation and advocacy. His work blended mythological themes, shamanic visions, and Huichol cosmology, often featuring motifs like circular "nierika" portals symbolizing spiritual connections. His involvement in exhibitions and publications introduced this tradition to broader audiences while advocating for Huichol rights and heritage. Sánchez's work, alongside that of Mariano and Cilau Valadez, highlights the evolving scope of this vibrant art form. Like other shamanic yarn painters, Sánchez's works reflect his dreams, his vision quests, triggered by consuming sacred peyote, and influenced by Huichol mythology and history. Sánchez titled this work "Creation of the World" and described the vision inspiring it on its reverse, written in pencil. The representative from Milagros working with Sánchez, provided the following English explanation based on conversation with the artist and sent to Laurie Vander Velde in a card: "Jose sent me this footnote about your painting...Titled "Creation of the World" - Here we see how the people open their eyes. We see the place where the god 'Grandfather Tail of the Deer' came to open the eyes of the people or of the pueblo and called it 'Life.' "The world in which the First time 'Nierica' or the entrance to the spiritual worlds was put in front of the people. Together they planted a seed and cultivated it and more seeds were born and that is how the life of the first ancestors was formed. First came the seed and the trees and the flowers. The Tree is man and the woman is the flowers and the seeds are their hearts. The

body is to give life and to bear fruits. Here we see Grandfather Tail of the Deer in the center who designed the people and all that we see in the 'Nierica' "Cauyamarie (the deer) acts as interpreter of the gods. "Tacutzi Nakawe gives birth to all forms of life, and to thoughts, peyote, and the corn. The birds are the messengers to and from the gods. All that you see is a communication of the powers of the gods who can give us a better life. Together the people and the governing god who is Grandfather Fire 'Tatewari', Cauyamari are alive. You find everything in the sacred place of 'Wiricuta' in the desert including life, family. This is where the seed of the 3 worlds was planted. The 1st world was a dream, the 2nd world was where the spirit was born and in the 3rd world is where the Body rests. The seed of the father and mother of the three worlds - water, earth, wind, and the life of the world which is the sun and the dreams of the gods and the road/path to Wiricuta and the sacred places. This also represents the four cardinal points - earth, wind, fire, water - which gave life to the body. This is how we see our world and are able to know the path to where we can come to rest and know the ancient gods of the world."

Dimensions

48 × 48 × 1 in. (121.9202 × 121.9202 × 2.54 cm)