

Crafting
MAYA
Identity

Contemporary Wood Sculptures
from the Puuc Region of
Yucatán, Mexico

Jeff Karl Kowalski, editor



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Catalog for an Exhibition of Carvings by the Artisans Miguel Uc Delgado,
Jesús Marcos Delgado Kú, Angel Ruíz Novelo, and Wilbert Vázquez

» Jack Olson Gallery—School of Art, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL,
August 31–September 25, 2009

» Teatro Peon Contreras—Mérida, Yucatán.
September–October 2010

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Design by Julia Fauci

FRONTISPIECE:—Jesús Delgado Kú's outdoor workshop. Jesús often carves parts of his wooden
replicas at a small table outside at Kabah and near the site's entrance.

FRONT COVER: *upper left: 1.2*—The Main Palace at Sayil, Yucatán.; *lower left: 1.21*—Angel Ruíz
Novelo, Seated ruler ("Bird Jaguar IV") holding a two-headed serpent 'ceremonial bar'; *center: 1.1*—
Angel Ruíz Novelo, Lady K'abal Xook with a 'vision serpent' and royal ancestor; *right: 1.25*—Miguel Uc
Delgado, three-dimensional portrait head of the ruler K'inich Janaab Pakal II.

BACK COVER: *top: 1.5*—Hacienda Yaxcopoil, located south of Mérida; *below: 1.45*—Miguel Uc
Delgado, Yum Kaax, the Maize God or Lord of the Forest Field.

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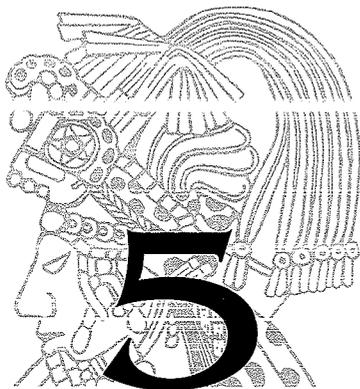
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AESTHETICS AND AMBIVALENCE OF MAYA MODERNITY

The Ethnography of Maya Art

Quetzil Castañeda

► The expression of pre-Columbian Maya themes and images in contemporary Maya wood carving is an art that was invented in the mid-1970s at Chichén Itzá.¹ This tradition of art and handicrafts did not develop out of any prior tradition; it has no direct social connection to, nor historical continuity with, any previous tradition of Maya art. It was created “out of whole cloth” by a resident of Pisté and an employee of the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) who worked as a park warden (*custodio, guardián*) at the archaeological and tourist site of Chichén Itzá.² In the absence of a regional handicraft tradition of carving statuary in the style and image of pre-Columbian art, he began carving wood and stone for sale as souvenirs to tourists. Nearly forty years later the artwork has been recognized locally as *arte pisteño* or Pisté Maya art and has developed a surprising breadth of forms, figures, styles, and aesthetics. *Arte pisteño*, or the artwork of Pisté, has been the original

stimulus and source for the development of derivative wood-carving styles in other communities, such as Yaxuna, Popolá, and Ebtun. The Pisté art has also played an influential role in the emergence and continued expression of the Puuc artwork.³

Historically speaking, Chablé’s carvings are the origin or ur-source of Pisté community’s different styles of wood and stone carving, batik, and synthetic molding reproductions that has come to proliferate in the northern Yucatán peninsula. There are other styles of wood handicrafts and art that are informed and inspired by pre-Columbian Maya artwork, but, because of their derivation from and secondary relationship to the art of Pisté artisans and artists, they should be considered as subsets of *arte pisteño*, whether as community-based styles or as aesthetic variations. The two major derivative styles are the artwork of Puuc-based artists working primarily in the *réplica* style and the handicraft of Yaxuna artisans who primarily produce *tablas* and *máscaras*. As well, there are other Maya wood-carving traditions, such as discussed by Scott,⁴ that have entirely different content matter if not also mode of production. The wood carving of the Coba-Tulum corridor is one such distinct and independent Maya handicraft tradition which coheres around a folk or folkloric aesthetic.⁵ In this chapter, I provide a historical and ethnographic context to Pisté art by addressing questions of tradition and identity. This leads me to pose the problem of “categories,” to which I return in the conclusion after sketching the aesthetic and stylistic development of Pisté Maya art.

The Work of Tradition in the Age of Identity

The crafts made by contemporary representatives of the distinct Maya, Zapotec, and Nahuatl groups preserve techniques and art traditions over a thousand years old... *Continuity in social traditions is ensured in craft production.* The intrinsic value of crafts to the sophisticated traveler or catalogue consumer is precisely the human labor embodied in the product and what it tells about a whole way of life....*The traditions*

*of the society that produces the craftspeople inhere in the form and function of the objects.*⁶

Many villages in Yucatán have some industry like hammock or hat making, the manufacture of pottery, baskets, candles, or chocolate mixers, *but Pisté [sic] has none of these.... During my observations in the village ... No one carves stone or wood.*⁷

In the mid-1970s, Vicente Chablé began to carve soapstone and species of soft woods, *piich* (guana-caste) and *chakah* (gumbo limbo), into representations of pre-Columbian Maya gods. Previously, without evidence to the contrary of Steggerda's view (above) that no tradition of wood or stone handicraft production existed, except for what any peasant knows about whittling sticks for building fences, houses, and animal pens. Further, there is no evidence that any craft production that involved copying, reproducing, or imitating pre-Columbian Maya material culture existed after the Indigenous conversion to Christianity in the sixteenth century and the forced abandonment and transformations of ritual, destruction of idols, and torture to death for idolatry under Spanish colonialism. Contra the claims of scholars, such as June Nash, who assert thousands of years of cultural continuity of Maya artisanry based on household production, there is no folk "system of objects" whose production has maintained and maintains a Maya folk aesthetics across the last 200 years, much less 500 or 1,000. In Pisté, as is the case throughout the Yucatán, no tradition of aesthetic production based on pre-Columbian cultural forms or content have survived either colonialism or the nineteenth century Caste War that transformed the social, ethnic, political, and cultural landscapes of Yucatán.⁸

With no tradition to follow or build on, Chablé was inspired by ancient Maya art forms with which he was familiar as a resident of Pisté and as an INAH *custodio* of the archaeological site of Chichén Itzá. While one of his sources was the statuary of Chichén, a second source was the painted reproductions of the seated

gods depicted in pre-Columbian codices, such as the Dresden or Madrid, that were painted as murals and decorations on Pisté restaurants in the 1970s. Chablé understood that the tourists who visited Chichén (which in those days numbered less than a hundred thousand a year compared to over a million a year by the end of the twentieth century) were interested in taking home some type of handicraft souvenir to remember their adventures in Yucatán and Chichén specifically. Thus, he began to devote his free time to carving and selling figures. Knowing that he had cornered the market on a growth industry, he sought to keep the knowledge of his tools and techniques hidden. Eventually, so goes the story told me by Silverio Koyok and his brother-in-law, Mitch Ucan, some boys discovered the secret cave in the forest surrounding the pyramids of Chichén where Vicente had cached his merchandise. Using the goods as leverage, Silverio, Mitch, and their siblings learned to carve from Chablé. From these men the techniques spread to others in Pisté.

In this inauspicious manner, Vicente Chablé created a handicraft tradition entirely for consumption by tourists where none had previously existed.⁹ The modification of previously existing artisanry and the invention of completely new "traditional" handicrafts is documented throughout the world as an expected dynamic of local, Indigenous, and community engagement with tourism.¹⁰ In this case, this artwork, invented by Chablé and developed by the Ucans, Koyoks, Balams, Tuns, and an increasing number of others, was a unique creation. There was no precedent or parallel in Pisté or elsewhere in Yucatán. Nor is there similar wood carving in other areas of the greater Maya world, such as the Guatemalan highlands where masks for the Dance of the Conquest is a centuries-old tradition. There may certainly have been (and now are) other "traditional" wood-carving traditions in other parts of Yucatán, e.g., in Ticul and Coba, but they are still not this tradition, which was designated "Pisté Maya art" or *arte maya pisteño* by the community in 1999.¹¹ The artwork was based only

on Chablé's loose imitative style of pre-Columbian figures and images which resulted in "rudimentary" or "archaic"-looking forms that is called by Pisté artists and artisans today by the concept, using the Spanish word, *rústico* ("rustic").¹² Using one part artistic creativity and one part entrepreneurship, Chablé put his rudimentary carving skills to work in developing a product that compelled consumption by tourists and, in turn, inspired creative innovation by competitors.¹³

This was indeed an invented tradition in the sense that Hobsbawm and Ranger elaborated in 1985. For decades the Pisté community itself disparaged the art form as *engaño* (Sp., "deceit," "fraud") and *chen tus* (Maya, "just lies"); that is, as a false representation, lie, and hoax, since the art is not pre-Columbian and it has nothing to do with the living contemporary culture and society of the Maya: contra Nash, there is neither continuity of culture nor meaningful function with regard to this artform/handicraft. This is the case even if Maya Protestants from the nearby community of Xocempich have never engaged in wood carving precisely because they view it as having a real meaning, that is, the meaning idolatry. This view, however, is fairly preposterous to the several hundred Pisté artisans—Catholics, Evangelical Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Pentecostals—who carve wood. In other words, the carvings have no relationship to any contemporary ritual, religious beliefs, or spiritual worlds that have emerged before or after Spanish colonization and conversion to Christianity in the sixteenth century. If indeed, it is true, as Nash suggests, that the value of handicrafts is in terms of "what it tells about a whole way of life" then the life these carvings speak about is that of the tourists who consume this artisanry. Indeed, the artwork is less "auto-ethnography" of contemporary Maya culture, than ethnography of the Western romantitized visions of Maya culture and México.

The artwork had and has no meaning for its producers other than that which is derived from the personal satisfaction of being engaged with aesthetic

production and the economic value of gaining an income. It has no functional use except as a product to sell to anyone who would buy it, that is, tourists. The production of the artwork is not motivated by ethnic, social, or cultural identification: unlike traditional dress, food or corn farming, there is no expression that "we" as "Maya" make our wood carvings this way, not that way, nor motivation that "I as Maya" carve wood because it is "my cultural way of life" and I therefore carve it in such-and-such a manner. The producers are not wood-carving artisans because they are Maya; they are Maya who choose to make a living carving wood, in some cases after decades of having been engaged in other kinds of economic activities that have ranged from agricultural work, masonry, waiting tables, hotel service, making and selling food, to just about any other wage labor and small time entrepreneurial activities. Further, the produced objects do not reflect on the maker an identity of "being" "Maya," of indigenous ethnicity, of social belonging as "Maya," or community identity as Pistéño any more-or-less than the economic occupations of tour guide, taxi driver, mason, or grocery store owner. Further, because the wood carvers recognize that they live in the present in contrast to the ("ancient") Maya that lived centuries ago, they are not producing, only reflecting, "Maya culture" (which is implicitly defined throughout Yucatec and Mexican society as "pre-Columbian Maya"). Thus, they identify the objects that they produce as cultural things that belong to contemporary (not ancient) Yucatec Maya culture as handicrafts and works of art, not as pre-Columbian Maya artifacts and archaeological patrimony. The real issue therefore is not how "they" identify with it, but how do "we" outsiders ascribe to it an identity of iconic and symbolic Mayaness.

I belabor this point because the anthropology of non-Western art, especially in contexts of tourism, has come to be dominated by the fetish of identity. In other words, the analysis of artistic production in terms of how locals construct their cultural identity

has become a mandated requisite for scholars working on this topic.¹⁴ However, the construction of (cultural) identity, in this case and I would hypothesize in many more cases, is an ideological issue of and for the analyst, as well as for the collector: It is not an issue for the producers. In fact the insistence on identitarian analyses of tourist arts and non-Western arts is a continuation of what Greenblatt called the viewer-response of (ethnographic) "resonance" versus (aesthetic) "wonder." It thereby maintains the art-culture "system" of high/low art described by Clifford (see Scott and Kowalski, and Scott, this volume) despite the insistence, on the part of some anthropologists and art critics/historians, that the Eurocentric categories of art have been overcome or debunked.¹⁵

To be perfectly clear, producing artwork does create an identity, but it's that of artisan or artist (which ever the case may be for a given producer). This means that the producers recognize themselves as an artisan (as is the case with the Puuc artisans) or more rarely as an artist. All producers are recognized as artisans by the community, that is as someone who devotes their time and energy to this and not to some other economic activity, say waiting tables or writing articles about Maya culture for academic journals, such as the case with one Maya that I know from this community.¹⁶ In Rome, the waiters and cooks do not identify themselves as Italian because they serve or cook pizza, nor would they feel less Italian if they were to work in a Chinese restaurant and cook or serve General Cho's Chicken instead of carpaccio. In truth, for some artisans, mass producing wood carvings or its derivative forms is not much different than waiting tables for a dollar or producing "handmade Indian Jewelry" in a basement factory hidden from Santa Fe tourists as discussed by Berlo in this volume. There are, of course, economic occupations and activities that are deeply associated with cultural identities and thus reflect back to the agent a cultural identity. For example, traditional agriculture, bee-keeping, dancing Yucatec-style for tourists,

cooking Yucatec cuisine at home or in a restaurant, and even working as an archaeologist or park guard at an archaeological site for the INAH are pervaded by sentiments of Maya identity; in contrast are jobs such as that of a taxi driver, an occupation that is suffused with a Western-modernity sensibility and can provide drivers a modern versus traditional identity.

There are others, however, who do have deep feelings of personal self-worth related to carving. They pride themselves in their unique skills, are committed to further development of their abilities, aestheticize designs, and, in short, identify *as artist*. However, these sentiments are typically not expressed by the label "artist" except in delimited contexts since there is no formally identified Art market in Pisté and Chichén, only artisanry markets. The manifest expression of an artist-identification is, therefore, subtle and resides materially in the quality of their work and the recognition by Pisté artisans and artists of the qualitative difference in their work and their abilities to produce technically more difficult pieces that are made with greater quantity and quality of decorative cuts. There is, of course, more to the artist—for example, style, creativity, innovation, range of forms, control of design and composition, mastery of hard woods—than just intricacy and depth of relief and carving, but this is a primary criterion. Although these elements are used by artisans to distinguish among themselves, the idea of self-identification as "artist" emerges in the historical interaction with anthropology. Specifically, the ethnographic action research project that I directed in 1998 and 1999, which used focus group workshops with wood carvers, sought to encourage and enable artisans to conceptualize both their subject position as artists and their aesthetic production as art.¹⁷

Again, their self-identity as "Maya" is not necessarily created or furthered *by being an artist* or by *producing Maya art*: they are already comfortable being Maya or *mayeros* (speakers of the Maya language) in a community where "being Maya" is neither a social or a psychological struggle and "self-identifying as

Maya" does not depend upon an exterior manifestation that fits the anthropological fetishization of indigenous identity.¹⁸

On the face of it, therefore, this art, consumed as if it were a traditional handicraft by tourists, does not fit with the categorical conception of traditional handicrafts as expressed by June Nash (quote above)—which may lead some readers and has definitely led a significant number of archaeologists, Mérida intellectuals, and state cultural arts promoters over the years to sympathize with the local assessment of this as *engaño*. The idea of fraud or hoax is often ascribed by these social agents because of the tourism context of production and because they feel that the "Maya" culture of the producers is "false" and "corrupted" for being modern and, therefore, that the producers themselves are *unworthy cultureless or de-cultured, inauthentic, non-Maya Maya*.¹⁹

The first generation of artisans were primarily corn farmers and *ejidatarios* (i.e., federally recognized recipients of federal land grants held by communities). They were males ranging from adolescent teens to fifty plus years old. This was a group of men that enjoyed quite a bit of personal freedom in their lives, although within the constraints of few wage labor opportunities and little to no formal education. They took quick advantage of the opportunity to work for quick and easy cash during the tourist high seasons. Often they consumed their profits in Chac Pool brand aguardiente and gained a bad reputation in the community for their public intoxication, frequent fighting, and bad behavior. They were called *chac mooleros* in honor of one of the figures that they carved, i.e., the Chac Mool; a sculptural type depicting a man sitting on his buttocks with knees bent up, head turned to the side, and hands holding a plate or bowl over the stomach or chest (see Miguel Uc Delgado's Chac Mool in Figure 1.52 of the catalog).²⁰ Significantly, this famous statue, considered a kind of Mayan Hermes because the priests locate offerings in the plate, say a fresh heart, as sacrifice to the gods, is known by the misnomer given to the statue by an

archaeologist in the nineteenth century. When excavating a platform Augustus Le Plongeon discovered a red (*chak*) painted "paw" (*mool*) and thus bequeathed this phrase in Maya as the enduring and provocative name of this statue. Thus, the first generation of carvers were nicknamed *chac mooleros* perhaps, however, not as legend would have it, i.e., because they carved this figure so frequently. Instead, I suspect that the local nickname derives from recognition of the carvers' manipulation of tourist desires for souvenirs based on the disconnection between the Western visions of the Maya, on the one hand, and a lack of knowledge about the living reality of contemporary Maya, on the other hand.

To a great extent the lack of local and regional acceptance of the artwork as a traditional handicraft and of the producers as artisans stems from a complicated political process extending over twenty-five years. Pisté artisans and venders were systematically targeted by different state and federal agencies for having illegally invaded the archaeological zone of Chichén Itzá to sell directly to tourists.²¹ A stigma of being unruly, de-cultured Maya²² has been historically expressed by the identity label that was ascribed to the producers of the artisanry, *chac mooleros*, from the origin of the art form in the mid-1970s through to the mid-1980s.²² Driven by the tourism market of Chichén, the artisans and artists of Pisté have always shrugged off this disparagement, although in truth this denigration continues to work against them in terms of social status and against the market value of their artwork: the art and anthropology world of Yucatecan society continues to use subtle mechanisms of disparagement, delegitimization, and exclusion.

Nonetheless, through piecemeal governmental programs, including handicraft competitions and exhibits over the course of thirty years, the Pisté art tradition has slowly and grudgingly become validated and legitimated as a handicraft of Yucatán by state agencies such as Culturas Populares, the State Directive of Artisanry, the INAH, and also by locals.²³ For example, at the height of the invasion

of Chichén Itzá in 1985–87, the state director of the Yucatán office of the INAH at the time, Alfredo Barrera Rubio, pointed out to Pisté artisans that the concept of *chac moolero* was denigrating and that they should be proud to call themselves *artesanos* (“artisans”),²⁴ a label which operates as a highly significant sociopolitical concept in Mexico, regardless of any consideration of what this means in terms of cultural identities, aesthetics, and “art.” While this sociopolitical history is too intricate to elaborate in this chapter, I note that the local acceptance of the handicraft production as art derives primarily from the ethnographic fieldwork processes and curatorial programs that I directed from 1996 to 1999 in the context of the Field School in Experimental Ethnography. These projects included art exhibitions in Pisté and in the USA at the Durand Art Institute, Lake Forest, Illinois.²⁵ Not only did the general community of Pisté begin to recognize the aesthetic quality of the artwork as art, but it also encouraged a number of Pisté artists to participate in state handicraft competitions and in handicraft expos in México City.²⁶ Further, it was this intervention of anthropological projects and agents into the then existing art-writing circuit that assigns value in this tourism art-world of Yucatán that facilitated shifting self-concepts from artisan to artist.²⁷ —5.1 col.

The political contexts of invasions is also inseparable from the aesthetic development of the tradition. On the one hand, a de facto governmental policy of black-listing Pisté is evident in the near complete absence of any marketing support, subsidies, and inducements programs that the government gives to rural communities to develop their artwork. Pisté is not “poor,” Indian, or peasant *enough* to be a community “in need.” It has thus been avoided by the diverse state and federal agencies that are devoted to the task of what Garcia Canclini has called “hybridization” or *reconversión*, that is, a process of government subsidization of popular, folk, and Indigenous handicrafts with the aim of producing a symbolic “traditional México” that can be marketed for tour-

ism and that can generate a nationalist culture of modernity. On the other hand, the uneven periods of boom sales to tourists, especially during invasions inside the zone (1983–1987, 1993–1997, 2005–present) created such a demand on production that producers turned to mass production of pieces which have significantly lower artistic/aesthetic investment. The mass tourism market, with its preference for cheap, exotic (i.e., foreign, non-local) souvenirs, favors high volume production of lower quality and punishes the production of high-end artwork with higher aesthetic quality and thus (economic, cultural, aesthetic) value. The great works of Pisté Maya art are only occasionally made by artists and are generally based on special requests from collectors or their own need for creative-artistic expression; the majority of their time is devoted to the primary economic activity of handicrafts of greater or lesser art-value. These artists work at home and wait for a collector, anthropologist, or hotel owner from Playa del Carmen to arrive unannounced asking for this or that major piece of artwork to decorate a hotel, restaurant, or home. The mass market thus stimulates a dynamic contradiction between conservatism, or the tendency to reproduce the same with standard to diminishing quality, and artistic creativity, or the drive to create new figures, forms, and designs that no one else produces. Mechanical reproduction kicks in and motivates a large sector of artisans to mimetically copy “best-sellers” through silicon molding and faux-stone sculptures. As Walter Benjamin noted, the aura of art based in tradition withers by mechanical reproduction only to be re-formulated and re-established through the politics of capitalist markets.²⁸ Applied to the present situation, this suggests that the artwork of Pisté is simultaneously handicraft and art. But how is this duplicity, ambiguity, and ambivalence comprehended by anthropological theory and art history critique?

On the surface, this “indigenous art” holds no surprises as an invented tradition created in response to Western consumerism that is driven by rhetoric

and visions of Otherness. Current logic asserts that this too could be art in theory, so long as it fits the magic box of James Clifford's art-culture system and signals authenticity through the Maya identity of both object and producer.²⁹ But, these carvers are not "crafting" or "weaving" their Maya identity (as assert the titles of so many ethnographies of tourist art), since neither artisan nor artist play a strong game of identity. Meanwhile they continue to carve products that are carefully produced in response to market demands and consumer desires for souvenir-symbols of Maya culture and Mexico, whether this be mass-produced low end pieces or high end aesthetically detailed artwork. Rather than "craft (their) identity," they use practical and ethnographic understanding of consumer tastes as an inspiration to their own aesthetic and artistic creativity: It is this combination that drives the ongoing innovation and development of the art.

What, then, is and/or can be the status and, by implication, the value of this artwork? Before I address this question, I first describe Pisté Maya art³⁰ in terms of the historical emergence of its aesthetic styles and forms. In conclusion I return to this question of prospective value by turning to the gap between the theoretical idea that anything could be art and the practical reality that not just anything can circulate as art.

The Aesthetic Development of Pisté Maya Art

Pisté Maya art is an invented tradition with an astonishing breadth, sophistication, resilience, and creativity. This cultural invention of a "traditional" handicraft has flourished, matured, expanded, and even stimulated the development of secondary industries of mimetic reproductions. In this section I provide an overview of this historical development by tracing the aesthetic qualities and styles of the different forms that comprise this tradition.

The wood carvings or statuary in general are referred to as *figuras*, or figures, and initially also

ídolos, or idols. Initially, the artwork was first made from tree trunks of varying size from two species of soft wood, the *piich* and *chakah*. The first generation developed four primary figures: the Dios de Maiz or Corn God,³¹ the Ixchel Goddess of Birth and Death,³² the Young Corn God, and the Chac Mool;³³ other figures were much rarer, such as feathered serpents³⁴ stylized as the Maya ball game bat or serpent columns modeled on a common architectural feature at Chichén. The Dios de Maiz and the Ixchel are essentially the same figure with key substitutions in design and gender-based symbols.³⁵ Whereas the former squats with an oversized cornstalk held by both hands between his knees, the latter squats with hands on knees and the cornstalk becomes the head of baby emerging below. The former has a headdress of corn tassels carved onto the top end of the wood; the latter has a headdress of a skull held by two facing serpents heads. Given that the figures were front carved only, the bodies of these serpents were not portrayed until the 1990s when the backside began to be carved.³⁶ The Young Corn God is based on the famous bust from Palenque in which the ruler Pakal uses a headdress made of young corn tassels tied and tossed forward above of the face. —5.2

In addition to these basic forms that predominated production, there were less commonly carved figures that were discontinued, no doubt due to lack of sales. One such figure is the Jaguar Throne, which is based on a stone sculpture in the interior temple of an earlier building underneath the Pyramid of K'uk'ulkan. These *ídolo* figures were also carved in soapstone, *jaboncillo*, until the early 1980s. By 1985, when I first began fieldwork in Pisté, I had not actually seen a "stone carving" and I had assumed that the local lore that Vicente Chablé used to carve stone was fictional history. In August 1999, however, his sons showed me three stone carved figures—a Jaguar Throne, an Ixchel, and a Dios de Maiz—that their father had carved.³⁷ According to local artisan history, the exhaustion of the local source of soft stone led the artisans to create their own "stone." Using a mixture

of ground limestone powder, cal, and cement, they would create blocks of stone that were then carved or scraped into diverse shapes. Paint powder is added to the mixture for variations in color, but the predominant color ranged from purple, mauve, and slate, to dark grey; black outlining of the cut strokes were often added to increase perspective and depth. Initially the stone carvings replicated the forms and figures that artisans were already carving in wood.

The incorporation of the new material actually triggered a creative expansion of the repertoire of artisans in the 1980s, whom I have previously designated in my writings as the second generation. Perhaps in recognition of the aesthetic limits of this faux-stone, or what I have called *piedra pisteña*, Pisté stone, the artisans began to creatively play with forms, designs, and motifs. Different kinds of serpents, especially the ubiquitous serpent column (found in the Ball Court, Temple of Warriors, and Pyramid of K'uk'ulkan) and a double-headed serpent were added to the series. The Serpent Column was later hybridized with the Chac Mool such that a serpent head replaced the feet of the man. Small stone Pyramids, Maya heads with or without a headdress, ashtrays, and other pre-Columbian-like figurines were also developed.³⁸

The 1980s proliferation of forms also extended to carvings in wood. On the one hand, the wood carvers, who were virtually all adult males were inspired by the creativity of the stone carvers who tended to be boys from eight to sixteen years old. They began to copy the Serpent-Chac Mool and Double Headed Serpent, while also adding the Serpent Bate; *bate* refers to the carved club-like stone playing sticks used in the Mesoamerican Ball Game. Variations of the core *ídolo* form were also developed by the end of the 1980s, such as the seated and kneeling Maya with different kinds of headdresses, for example the Maya Guerrero (an empty handed seated or kneeling figure with a warrior's jaguar helmet). These artistic shifts in *ídolo* were just a prelude, however, for creative expansion of forms in the 1990s.

The design and motif elements consist of niche

cuts and, with increasing presence, detailed cuts (e.g. quincunx, frets, wavy line, diamonds, hatching). These cuts are delicately arranged in single or multiple lines, sets of niches, circles, and star patterns to represent body tattooing. The general quality of the carving remained rather simple; by the third generation this carving aesthetic with little design intricacy or detail (as well marked by poor mastery of forms, balance, and expressions of humans and animals) became known as "rustic" or *rústico*. In addition, a polite way of speaking about another artisan whose carving was *rústico* was to say that the artisan was "just learning how to carve." Enhancing this rudimentary style was the fact that, in this generation of artwork, the wood carvings remained in their natural color, unpainted. In the case of *piich* carvings, the color is a rich buttery yellow or bright white, while *chakah* pieces have dark yellow and reddish orange tone and striations.³⁹ Unfortunately, especially with *piich*, the color and weight did not signal, to my mind at least, either a hard or old wood, nor therefore a highly valued wood.⁴⁰

Beginning in 1991 I began to talk with Gilberto Yam about the artwork and ways of further developing the art. Giliberto, as well as many other Pisté artisans, was interested in using me as an informant on the consumer tastes of the tourists in order to create a product to meet demand. I repeatedly suggested that the wood should be treated, painted, or varnished in some way. There were two reasons for this suggestion. First, the dominant wood that was used at the time, especially the *piich*, has a bright buttery white color and is very light wood; I viewed these qualities as antithetical to normative cultural expectations of most tourists that assume expensive woods to be naturally darker in color and heavy in weight. Second, freshly carved bright colored wood did not communicate any historical depth to the pieces, which in fact were often still wet from having been so freshly cut.⁴¹ Thus, having in mind the Guatemalan Maya masks and Christian figures that have pock marks and missing chunks of wood for

having been eaten by termites, I suggested the need to "antiquate" the wood.⁴² I recounted the scene from *Art In and Out of Africa*,⁴³ also described and analyzed in Chris Steiner's work, in which African middlemen smeared almond or other food mixtures on fresh wood carvings so that chickens and turkeys would peck at and chew up the wood for a few days. Neither this method nor the idea of antiquing ever took hold among Maya artists in either Pisté or the Puuc region (though it has I believe among Highland Guatemalan Mayans) no doubt because of artistic pride of creating something beautiful. My artist friends would only laugh at the clever deceitfulness of the Africans and the ignorant naiveté of Americans. They expressed a moral sentiment that this staging of authenticity and antiques was wrong. Thus, instead, Gilberto Yam began two years of experimentation with different kinds of paints, varnishes, and techniques of creating an *acabado*, or "finishing." His final determination was initially at least a secret combination of *chapopote* or tar used for paving streets and synthetic paint.⁴⁴ In trying to imitate his finishing, artisans created a number of different *acabados* with different types of water and oil based paint. However, the technique that Gilberto developed is the more predominant *acabado* used today.⁴⁵

The invention of this *acabado* marks the emergence of the third generation of artwork by 1993. There is in addition a general and widespread maturation of the technical skills and aesthetic vision of the artisans. With more than a decade of carving experience, the adolescent and young boys that came of age in their twenties and thirties began an artistic revolution. The Jaguar head was created by one artist who used a plastic key chain as his source for what became an iconic best-selling souvenir. Using the *ídolo* as a model, new figures were created from the basic Ixchel-Corn God form or the iconography and motifs of these figures were expanded and further developed: the God of Medicine, the Dios de la Suerte, Maya Sacerdote, Maya Guerrero, and other derivatives, were created by having the figure sit cross-legged, instead of kneeling or

squatting, and holding their hands palm up or down and/or holding in offering any number of different things: balls of incense, bowls, plates, spears, heads, corn cobs, and skulls. In addition, the headdress also became a space for new creative expression on the *ídolo* figures. Faces or full bodies of serpents, jaguars, and then other humans began to be carved emerging out of the headdress in a manner that inspired the further development of the *máscara* and the *tabla* forms as discussed below (see Figures 2.5, 2.7).

Aesthetically, the rendition of the body, that is, the shaping of muscles and cheeks, the curves and expression of the eyes, nose, and mouth became exquisite and vivid. While the musculature retained a style of realism and not a mimetic realistic depiction, the figures came alive. The details of the face in combination with the new painting created an engaging aesthetic in which the faces, especially the eyes and mouth, communicate a unique feeling of presence. As always, the signature mark of the artist that composed the piece is found in the aesthetic rendition of the mouth, nose, and eyes, in terms of shape, line, and curve. The artisans are especially attuned to portrayals of facial features as being both Maya and believable/realistic. They use this as one aesthetic criteria by which to evaluate a work and the skills of the artisan.

With these new figures the *ídolo* tended to shift from frontally carved or partly three-dimensional to fully in-the-round statuary. The dominant tendency is nonetheless still to create work with frontal emphasis. Bases and detailed carving of the bases also began to be developed, at least in part to my insistence that this was an area that needed to be creatively explored as the *ídolo* moved to full statuary. The Ixchel figure is especially interesting because from early on the back of the piece had some minimal elaboration in those cases that incorporated intertwined bodies on the back of the figure to complete the two serpent heads that sat facing forward on the Ixchel headdress. It is in this figure that the technical and artistic skills truly manifested and differentiated the artist from

the artisan. Ramon Quijano Balam proved himself as a master of aesthetic design, details, expression, and balance in small, intricately carved statuary (see also Figure 2.7). —5.3 col.

The *máscara* form, which originated in the '80s, was also further developed. The *máscara* is carved from a board, *tabla*, or a very slightly curving (nearly flat) section of a trunk. In its original development, the *máscara* could not stand on its own; it could only be hung on a wall and *máscara* curve is too flat to have a viable function as a mask.⁴⁶ The masks consist of a Maya face with a headdress consisting of feathers and headband. As the technique of expression in the faces was continually refined, a new form, the *mas-carón* developed. As a way to communicate its unique aesthetic form and signature, I have referred to this as the Maya totemic style. A second, third, and even fourth level was added to the *máscara*. Sometimes a second face was added on top of the headdress of the first. Another variation was based on adding a series of other figures in miniature on top of the headdress. These could be pyramids, jaguars, serpents, humans in positions of offering, priests taking sacrifice, and human faces. There are crucial distinctions between the *máscara* and the *mas-carón*. The *mas-carón*, is carved to stand on a flat surface and with multiple levels of figures in the headdress which characteristically is centered on a second level human face, shown frontal or profile, and in the same scale as the bottom full frontal face. Typically the faces are not exceptionally realistic but more representational. In contrast the *máscara* by definition only has one face, is carved to be hung, and tends to only have one level of headdress, even if this space can become quite complicated in composition. (See Figures 2.4, 2.5, both of which creatively use and break from both the *máscara/mas-carón* forms in their distinct headdress carvings.)

The level of bas-relief carving extending from the headdress was always placed at the top level and signaled a creative adaptation of aesthetic techniques. It further lead to the development in the mid-1990s of

an entirely new form of carving on the *tabla*. Although I cannot give an exact date, the *tabla* form did not exist in 1995 but appears widespread by 1997 among a handful of the best artisans, that is, those who came to implicitly identify themselves as artists. Due to the increasing exhaustion of the *chakah* and *piich* trees, cedar wood boards began to be purchased for use by the artists. The boards or *tablas* offered a blank slate for new kinds of aesthetic creation. Initially, the artists trimmed away virtually most of the wood to produce a single standing figure that was a direct copy of famous stela and stucco panels from Palenque, Yaxchilan and Bonampak. Emblematic of this work is the production of the Tomb (sarcophagus lid) of Pakal, other Pakal figures, Yaxchilan Queens, the Vision Serpent, Bird Jaguar, and other iconic figures of Classic Maya art. This mimetic copying of pre-Columbian figures or images is locally known as *réplica*.

These are the Pisté pieces that are closest in approach and appearance to the work of the Puuc artisans featured in this catalog and discussed in Mary Katherine Scott's essay. It is not clear to what extent the idea of *tabla réplica* spread from the Puuc to Pisté, these were separate developments, or whether it had a more diffuse origin, based on, for example, the extensive reproduction of Pakal Sarcophagus Lid on burned leather (a Chiapas, specifically Palenque product).

Pisté artists were not content to copy famous pre-Columbian works of art. Many artists also created their own "invented" narratives and figural designs in the blank space of the *tabla*. These invented pieces whether in *tabla* or *ídolo* are called *inventada* in contrast to *réplica* interpretations of known pre-Columbian pieces. Wilbert Serrano Mex, for example, are posed in distinct acts, i.e., narratively composed into scenes that articulated an overall theme or concept. *Sacrificio a K'uk'ulkan* is an example (see Figure 2.3). Other artists created a symbolic style in which all the figures were organized around the depiction of a singular activity or event. *Sacrificio a K'uk'ulkan* is an example (see Figure 2.3). To my mind, the narra-

tive style, figures, and aesthetic of which Wilbert is representative, resonates greatly with the carvings of Tajín, a lesser-known Classic Veracruz archaeological site in the Mexican Gulf Coast region. This is due to the use of miniaturized figures of humans and serpents typically in acts of sacrifice depiction, priests, minimal use of jaguars and death imagery, and the use of geometric or serpentine borders to frame the entire image or individual narrative scenes. The Tajín aesthetic of created bas-relief contrasts to the lintel style of *réplica* copy: The former depicts invented figures, the latter is a mimetic copy of well-known pre-Columbian figures almost always derived from the three sites just mentioned above. The former always includes main figures in large cut and secondary scenes with miniatures; the latter includes the main figures in large and add as iconic elements, to a greater or lesser degree, the peripheral images such as hieroglyphs, birds, star signs, and flora. Diagnostic of the Tajín-style is the representational realism of the human body which expresses not an anatomically accurate rendition of the shape and flow of body muscles, but rather a symbol of body mass. This creates a busyness of the figure that contrasts to the uncut, smooth surfaces of human figures in other styles.

By the early to mid-1990s, if not earlier, a number of Pisté artisans began to produce *tabla réplicas*. Although the exact dating of the emergence and source of inspiration of the Pisté *tabla* is unclear, it seems likely to have been initiated through familiarity with the *tabla* bas-relief of the first Puuc artists working in this form. Among Pisté artists, the carving of bas-relief replicas in *tabla* was restricted to only a few of the more skilled artisans, such as José Leon Tuz Kituk. Among the more commonly produced replicas are bas-relief lintels from Palenque and Yaxchilan, especially the Tomb of Pakal sarcophagus lid, the capture scene from Yaxchilan Lintel 8, and the famous Vision Serpent from Palenque.⁴⁷ (See Figure 2.2.)

Another set of artists in Pisté, best represented by Jorge Pool Cauch, took the *máscara* headdress to a

new aesthetic development by placing replicas of bas-relief figures from the repertoire of the Classic period lintel figures. He had a predilection for the Queens of Yaxchilan. The *máscara* in this catalog shows Lady Sac K'uk from Yaxchilan, posed on top of the famous Chaak Mask, or Rain God, which is iconic of Yucatec Maya Late Classic as seen throughout buildings at Chichén Itzá (see Figure 2.4).

The pioneer of the bas-relief, however, is José León Tus Kituc, who began to carve at the age of twenty and quickly gained fame in the Pisté art scene with his exploration of high relief up to three inches on cedar, a much harder wood than either *chakah* or *piich*. Along with his older brother Luis, who was a master of *ídolo* figures cut in trunks of cedar, they initiated the development of *réplica* figures in *tabla*. José León was the artist that challenged all others to match his intricacy of detail and depth of cut in bas-relief. Having mastered the ability to render the mimetic details as well as a vivid, animated expression of replicas, he developed a uniquely personal aesthetic style, which is manifest clearly in *The Archer*. This hybrid and humorous figure is total and yet quite serious kitsch. The main figure is an Aztec warrior king, or Huey Tlatoani, known as Cuauhtémoc, ready to launch an arrow into the air, inspired by 1950s Mexican calendar art, which in turn is a kitsch reproduction of an earlier Mexican Romanticist Neo-Aztec period of painting. At his feet is a woman rendered from the cover of a cheap, risqué romantic Mexican *novella* (a type of popular literature produced in "comic" book form). In José León's *Archer*, the Aztec warrior-king and princess are posed on top of a Classic Maya Period Serpent Scepter Bar that symbolizes divine kingship; this serves as a narrative border under which sit two Maya slaves hunched over as they carry the burden of the carvings above (see catalog Figure 2.1; compare with Figure 2.2 a *réplica tabla*).

By the end of the 1990s, during the transition into the fourth generation of artwork, *mascarónes* came into vogue. These figures, carved from trunks, retain a horizontal curve that creates a balance and a base

so that the piece can be placed onto a flat surface instead of being hung on a wall like masks; their size and weight prohibit hanging them on a wall. With the *mascarón*, Pisté artists extended the totemic style with new creative designs in the headdress and faces, which at least initially always had double-stacked faces of the same scale. These tended toward the large and very large, in part due to the use of older *piich* and *chakah* trees from forest reserves in communities far away from Pisté. Unfortunately, the apogee of the *mascarón* signaled, finally, the exhaustion of a supply source of wood from trees and the definitive turn to cedar and *tabla*, that is, wood boards cut by lumber yards, as the main medium.

Nonetheless, in the fourth generation of artwork, Pisté artists were able to create a wide array of new figures in *ídolo* form that built on and extended the 1980s repertoire of serpent figures. At the onset of the new millennium, included among the new forms that were created were the Double Headed Serpent, the Double Entwined Serpent, The Serpent-Jaguar Throne, and the Feathered Serpent. Secondary forms were tried out with the consumers. Other non-Maya figures such as the Sleeping Mexican with Sombrero, initially a ceramic from central México, and the realistic Turtle appeared but do not have widespread production. Their simple designs are more inexpensively produced through silicon molding with Pisté stone. These secondary items however are clearly of the souvenir class of handicrafts: cheap, little time invested in production, no details, and iconic of "México" of *lo tradicional* (the traditional). —5.4 col.

In 2003 a newly renovated *máscara* suddenly appeared on the scene after a period of aesthetic decline. The pioneer in this aesthetic revolution was José Mitch Dzib, a young man with a strong artistic vision that began carving in the 1990s in his late teens. Earlier, he had created the Maya Governor, a painted cedar *ídolo* (1999) that expressed a creative innovation in the *ídolo* form with its break from the core Ixchel-Corn God model; the piece nonetheless manifests a technical difficulty with the hard wood

that the young artist was to overcome in the bas-relief figures and facial details of the new *máscara*. This new *máscara* had three major innovations. First, the face was carved with geometric cuts that would later be painted in multiple colors to give a mosaic effect. The new technique was stunning for the way the *acabado* and geometric cuts transformed the wood into a ceramic tiling or jade piece set that strongly resonates with the famous jade Maya death masks from Palenque or Kalakmul (see Figure 2.6). Second, the headdress began to be carved with miniature figures of humans, jaguars, serpents, and other elements that created a strong image of symbolism and meaning. Third, an increasing number of *máscaras* began to be made with the cedar. These masks tend to remain unpainted, especially when they carry extensive detail work. Nonetheless, there is a high percentage of small and simple masks in cedar, as well as the few *piich* and *chakah* *máscaras* that continue to be painted.

In summary of this sketch of the historical development of forms and styles, the general Maya aesthetic, contemporary, and pre-Columbian can be quite "baroque," that is cluttered or busy. Due to the consumer demand for less expensive and portable handicrafts, the market has imposed a reduction of the baroque aesthetic toward simpler, less detailed carving. On the one hand this has reduced the incentive for artistic intricacy, details, and creative expression. The exception to this tendency is the ubiquitous Sarcophagus Lid from the Tomb of Pakal, which as a *réplica* maintains a high level of baroque detail. On the other hand, this market drive has compelled the artists to continue to refine their line, curves, and balance in the portrayal and composition of the human figure. This factor is clearly expressed in the double dynamic of the reduction of serpents and jaguar heads and the expanded use of the miniature human in full form, as well as full-bodied jaguars, as a component of headdresses and bas-relief *tabla*.

The artistic expertise in this regard of the Pisté Maya artist is immediately identifiable. It starkly

contrasts to the proliferation of Yaxuna produced *máscaras* and *tablas* in the Chichén market place. The latter are easily identifiable by the verticality of composition marked by a long curving line, as well as the broad, simple designs, lack of intricate details, flat or matte tones from water-based paints, and earthy colors.

Historically speaking, the exhaustion of the soft woods in the proximity of Pisté forced artisans to search out a more stable source of wood; they began to buy trees from forests held as community property by Yaxuna, which sits on the north point of a large area of uninhabited jungle areas to the south. The Yaxuna peasant farmers realized they would gain more by producing handicrafts instead of being suppliers of raw materials. Thus, they began to supply the Pisté market with thousands and thousands of wood figures of all types that were only half shaped. The Pisté artisan would buy the modified raw product, complete the carving, finish the painting, and retail the item in their venues at Chichén or at other venues along the charter bus corridor—Xcalacoop, Cuncunul, Ebtun, Kaua, Valladolid—Mérida and the coastal destinations—Cancun, Tulum, Cozumel, Playa del Carmen. Today, the Yaxuna artisans supply Pisté venders, who sell at Chichén and a series of other stores in the tourist corridor and directly to other retailers located on the coast. In a majority of cases, especially in the markets from Valladolid to Mérida, the Yaxuna product has almost entirely displaced the Pisté product, and it has a strong presence in Playa del Carmen and Cancun. While the Yaxuna handicraft is not a rudimentary carving that comprises the *rústico* style, it nonetheless manifests a lower quality of design, carving, composition, and expression that merits consideration as its own style. To the untrained eye, it would be mistaken for a Pisté product.

As for the relationship between the Puuc and the Pisté artwork there is still need for much further study of the ethnographic contexts and comparative analysis of the aesthetics. Nonetheless, what is clear, as noted in the chapters by Scott, Kowalski, and Scott

and Kowalski, the Puuc artists do not participate in the full breadth of the Pisté art tradition. In terms of content, the following is offered: Puuc artists focus on *réplica* style pieces in *tabla* and, less frequently, in *ídolo*, particularly pieces such as the Old Ixchel and the Pakal bust. Further, Puuc artists are both not as much interested in snakes and jaguars and very likely to carve individual glyphs, inscribed dates, or the Maya calendar in *tabla* form. In contrast, the Pisté artisans refrain from carving glyphs in and of themselves (only as part of a larger work) and always focus their compositions on a human face (in the case of statuary and masks) or on human figures engaged in action (*tabla bas-relief*). Further, the Pisté artists love to carve jaguars or snakes, whether in full figure or just the face (e.g., Jaguar-Serpent Throne above), eschewed by the Puuc artists.

Indigenous Kitsch and Ambivalent Modernities

On a final note, it is important to reiterate that *arte pisteño* is an art and a handicraft. However, this tradition of artwork has never developed a folk aesthetic that might be considered as diagnostic or (stereo-) typical of "traditional" or "folk" handicrafts. By this I mean that peoples who engage tourism development in their communities typically begin to create a product marked by realism and naturalism in terms of both content and style. The Coba carvers in Quintana Roo are an example. They carve well-known animals such as deer, jaguars, cats, and other four legged jungle animals, *but not snakes*, which are ubiquitous, especially with aggressive demeanors, in Pisté Maya art. While these are not necessarily all "friendly" animals, they do tend to be (or to produce) "cute" and "fuzzy" (feelings); significantly, they fit within an ideological vision of a happy, harmonious folk world that is one with nature, non-modernity, positive traditional values, and non-capitalist economy. The aesthetic here is "folk primitivist" with smooth, balanced lines and minimalist detail that effect a simple realism or naïve realistic representation. The

Oaxacan *alebrijas* represents an interesting variation of this traditional folk art for its inclusion of “negative” spirit elements (demons, dragons, etc.) and for its extreme playfulness. Figures of and from nature (humans, real animals) are depicted, sometimes in an exaggerated or highly stylized realism other times in a totally fantastic, colorfully quasi-surrealistic mode, with fantasy animals. Nonetheless these fantastic-surreal animals and images of Death ultimately remain non-threatening and “cute” (i.e., happy in tone, non-threatening, not serious-somber)! The tradition of Guatemalan Mayan masks from Chichicastenango and Lake Atitlán are another example of a folk art style that relies on a representational realism (masks depicting Spaniards) alternating with naïve supernaturalism (masks depicting hybrid or spirit animals). These masks may not be entirely “cute,” but they have a happy tone that contrasts starkly with the somber, manly, perhaps at times “angry” or aggressive expressions of the Pisté Maya art. This is especially evident in the faces of various figures.

Pisté Maya art virtually completely stays away from the folk style of subject matter, representation, and simplicity. There are very rare cases where an artisan will produce this type of folk art, as noted above, and only as a side activity to the real—we could say with pointed irony, “authentic” artwork of Pisté. Given that Classic Maya civilization, or pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, generally, is the ur-source of artistic inspiration or is being re-interpreted by the artisans and artists, I would call the Pisté Maya art a “civilizational art,” that is an art whose aesthetics and primary subject matter derives from “elite,” “high” culture: it is not ever completely a “folk,” “primitive” or “primitivist,” popular, pop, or “traditional” art in terms of tone, aura, substance, style, design, aesthetics, or consumer ideologies. It hybridizes these modalities but in Bhabha’s sense,⁴⁸ not in the sense of Garcia Canclini.⁴⁹ *Arte pisteño* only ambiguously and ambivalently, partially but not fully, through tactical hybridity fits those pre-given art-world categories that correspond to the hierarchy of moder-

nity constructed by Eurocentric museums, collectors, galleries, academies, institutions, and critics.

Instead, Pisté Maya art resonates with the aesthetics of the Balinese, consider a Rangda mask, or of Islam, consider the designs formed out of Arabic writing on Mosques. It would cause too much mental and market friction to call those arts “folk.” Certainly not all the elites of major civilizations that have formed a Great Tradition of state society have had preferences for baroque aesthetics; some have enjoyed minimalist or subtle art, and they all have widely divergent arts and axiologies. Yet, the civilizational aesthetics of the Maya, past and contemporary, absolutely tends toward the baroque, the intricate, and the masculine as well as toward symbolism, narrative, and abstract concepts.

With tongue in cheek we might ascribe this contrast to a function of Robert Redfield’s folk-urban continuum, but only as a device to point to the substantive issue: the artisans and artists of Pisté have developed a unique art that has stimulated a large knock-off handicraft industry. We might, therefore, ask why and why here? The special circumstances of the development of Chichén Itzá as an archaeological tourism destination are paramount. This has provided nearly forty years of experience of creative expression combined with technical growth in relation to changing media and consumer tastes. Market demands have stimulated exploration of *réplicas*, that is copying of pre-Columbian art, and *inventada* forms, that is the creation of unique aesthetic production. While the dominant consumer preferences among tourists limits the quality of aesthetic production (quantifiable measurable in time invested in a carving and qualitatively measurable in terms of depth and extent of details), there is nonetheless a group of artists that express themselves with unique art when given the appropriate market opportunities with high-end buyers, collectors, and cultural art promoters.

Both *inventada* and *réplica*, one should note, constitute an art that is best comprehended as kitsch. The

Pisté Maya art is kitsch, or if you prefer an “indigenous kitsch.” It would not be worthwhile to rehearse here the various and often contradictory conceptions and ideologies of kitsch.⁵⁰ However, the reproduction of iconic images (such as a Marilyn Monroe, Hawaiian Hula Dancer, or Pakal) in different media and in a representation that communicates not the artist’s inner psychology or vision of the sublime but as a mirror that reflects back the consumer’s own ideological and fetishized tastes—in this case the western romantic fantasy and exoticism of the Maya—are certainly aspects of one vision of kitsch.⁵¹ It is this ubiquitous mode of kitsch that intrinsically operates in the gamut of indigenous and popular inventions of artwork that are tailored to the tourist-consumer tastes and desires for “the souvenir” of *their* experience. This kitsch principle is another reason why the invented folk, traditional, and indigenous arts are *modern arts*, participating in and producing an “alternative” modernity, to use terms of a now old debate. I would prefer to call this an “ambivalent modernity” for its ambiguous categorical standing in established art worlds, multiple economic and aesthetic values, and ambivalent symbolic-meaningful function for consumers.⁵² It is the marked, visible difference of these ambivalent modernities constituted by indigenous kitsch that conditions and enables the continual erasure of any adjectival qualifiers to (Western, globalized) Modernity. The Pisté artist provides consumers with an ethnography of their own marvelous desires “for” The Maya, or The Traditional México, The Other, embodied in a product that is conditioned by the anthropological knowledge machine. Pisté Maya art is an objectified ethnography of our Western romance with the Maya.⁵³ In the exchange, the mystery of that romance is erased to leave the consumer as a modern subject owning a smoking, yet modern, mirror.⁵⁴ This is indigenous kitsch at work—and it is a fully modern, contemporary art.

One might ask, as did one anthropologist colleague who specializes in art and tourism, why discuss this issue of the transcultural hybridity of the Maya art?

Have we not already learned that “art” is a Western label that is artificial and has no validity cross-culturally? Have we not learned that anything can be “art”? Perhaps “we” academics have learned this, yet not everything in fact circulates as art, sometimes for reasons that have nothing to do with aesthetics.⁵⁵ In fact, when Maya artists from Pisté sought to get their artwork into diverse kinds of art galleries in Chicago in 1999, they confronted the fact of these categorical ambivalences. Their work was refused by galleries and museum stores that specialize in Mexican handcrafts, “ethnographic art,” colonial era collectibles, or contemporary Latin American art precisely because it does not fit into a proper category. Thus, while academics theorize the aesthetic relativity of art, others control the assignation of commercial, cultural, and aesthetic value of all that circulates in art worlds. In this context, the politics of “art-writing” is a very important consideration: how one writes about art does matter.

In this chapter, I have sought to minimize the anthropological questions that would situate the Pisté artwork in an ethnographic frame. Thus, for example, I have pointed the reader to other publications that deal with the ethnographic, social, political, and cultural histories in which the artisans and artists are embedded. I am also not keen on elaborating how this art “crafts” Maya identity. This is not significant here primarily because the Pisté artisans and artists are not carving their identities as ethnic persons via this artwork. Thus, the insistence in the anthropology of art to theorize and analyze crafts peoples’ identity via their aesthetic production is clearly a mis-direction, not always a relevant issue. Instead, I have sought to focus on the artwork *per se* in a way that may strike some readers as something of a throwback to an “outdated” style of art criticism. My objective is simple: I seek to enact an art writing, or art commentary, that contributes to re-evaluation and re-assignation of the economic and cultural values of this artwork. In turn this exhibition and the catalog also contribute in a major way to bringing

this artwork out of the tourism market of folkloric handicrafts and into other circuits of exhibition and valorization.

As a final note it is worth remembering that Benjamin defined the aura of the work of art in terms of the unique time-space coordinates of ruins. Perhaps he was thinking of archaeological vestiges of Europe, perhaps the Roman Forum or the Parthenon, but we may use his idea to think about the heritage of Maya ruins. There is no doubt that the aura of archaeological ruins is exponentially expanded as “art”—whether specifically a culture’s intangible or material heritage, Civilization, World Heritage, or a Wonder of the World—by the proliferation of images, icons, and handicrafts that in one metonymic or another metaphoric way signal the original—or, rather the consumer’s experience of the original. It is this kitsch function that makes folk and traditional arts resolutely modern, regardless how much we erase and refuse this reality. But, what does it mean when one class of such “reproductions” is itself the subject of mimetic copying, replication, and imitation? This proliferation points to the originality and creativity of a new work of art. Out of these general conditions, out of their heritage of archaeological ruins, the Pisté Maya artists have created an intangible, modern heritage in the mode of a unique art that has only begun its dynamic growth and escalation into the modern world of contemporary art.

Notes

The present essay is based on over twenty years of collaborative research with Pisté Maya artists and with participants in the Field School in Experimental Ethnography (1997–1999). I thank Wilberth Serrano Mex, José León Tuz Kituc, Jorge Pool Cauich, Ramon Quijano Balam, José Mich Dzib, Antonio Pech Canton, Pablo Tun Bolio, Juan and Sixto Mex Mex, Juan Gutierrez, Alfonso Cetz Ceme, Gilberto Yam Tun, Lisa Breglia, Joy Logan, Juan Castillo Cocom, Abdel Hernández, Cynthia Robin, Reynaldo Mis, Rebeca Pat, Chris Reed, Yoli and Pepe Pat, Fernando Armstrong Fumero, Steve Mintz, Lawrence Hogue, Shawn Webb, Tim Wallace, Mark Leone, Geoff White, Jeff Himpele,

Patricia Fortuny de Loret de Mola, Leticia Becerril, Maggie Hug, Martha Lofte, Jay Indik, Ed Cimafonte, Kevin McGuirk, Christine Maher, Kim Benson, Saul Martínez, Laurie Kovacovic, Laura Bunt, Gisela Fosada, Edith Flores, Ana Wandless, Hutan Hejazi-Martínez, James Todd, Carlos Aranda, Paula Girshick, Mary Katherine Scott, David Nugent. A special appreciation and thanks to Miriam M Mendez Castañeda whose paintings and sculptures as well as collections of Mayan kitsch figurines from Guatemala doubt nurtured my fascination for the art and art-world of Pisté.

1. It is necessary to clarify that Maya is the proper name of one of the thirty or so indigenous groups that comprise the sociocultural and linguistic family of Mayan peoples. There is only one group that has self-identified (although with nuances and complications) as Maya (without the “n”) for over a hundred years (at least). This group originates in the Yucatán Peninsula, where the majority of Maya continue to live. They speak a language that linguists call Yucatec Maya, but Mexicans, Yucatecans, and its native speakers call simply Maya. Out of respect for these Maya, I use the term *Maya* (not *Mayan*) to refer to them and I use this proper name in both the singular and plural and as an adjectival qualifier.

2. The Spanish terms translate poorly as custodian or guard, but the work is akin to US park wardens and rangers. These are employed by the National Institute of Anthropology and History or INAH.

3. See chapters by Scott and Kowalski, Kowalski, and Scott.

4. This volume, Scott 2008.

5. Note that the Maya wood carving of the Coba-Tulum corridor is an entirely different style. It is a distinct Maya handicraft tradition that is formed by a folk or folkloric aesthetic.

6. Nash 1993, 2, 4, emphasis added.

7. Steggerda 1941, 22, 24–25.

8. See also Scott and Kowalski, this volume; Nash 1993.

9. It is worth noting as a comment on Steggerda above, that Chablé was among a small handful of persons from the town of Oxkutzcab in the Puuc region who have migrated to Pisté since the 1920s. The majority have worked as masons or as wardens for the government archaeology agency.

10. Discussion of this process, and specific examples, can be found in Graburn 1976, 1984; Clifford 1988; Garcia Canclini 1993, 1995; Ben-Amos 1977; Ben-Amos Girshick 2008; Errington 1998; Steiner 1994, 1995; Price 2001; Myers 2003; Mullin 1995, 2001; Chibnik 2003; Little 2004; Wood 2008; Morphy 1995.

11. Castañeda 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, www.osea-cite.org/history/ahdzib.php.

12. The rustic style is evident in Castañeda 2005b, 89, fig. 1, 91 fig. 3 and Castañeda 2004a 26, fig. 2 and 27, fig. 3.

13. Compare two of Chablé's figures (dates unknown) in Castañeda 2005b, 89, fig. 1 with an Ixchel by Gilberto Yam (1993) in Castañeda 2004a, 28, fig. 4 and both against the Ixchel *ídolo* in the exhibition catalog.

14. See, for example, Ben-Amos Girshick 2008, Philips and Steiner 1999, Marcus and Myers 1995, Myers 2003, Nash 1993, Little 2004, Wood 2008, Chibnik 2003.

15. Greenblatt 1991, Clifford 1988.

16. See Castillo Cocom 2005, 2007.

17. Castañeda, Fumero Armstrong, Breglia 1999, Castañeda 2004a, 2005a, 2005b. See www.osea-cite.org/history and especially www.osea-cite.org/history/ahdzib.php.

18. There are significant differences in the social nature and cultural expressions of identity as Maya, as artisan, as campesino, as Yucateco, as Indígena, and as Mexican across the Yucatán Peninsula. These differences have tended to be obliterated by anthropologists and ethnographers ever since the landmark studies by Robert Redfield in the 1930s. For example, Peter Hervik analyzes the ethnic-social categories of one small community in the Puuc region and generalizes these to all other subregions of the Peninsula, each of which have quite different social, economic, political, cultural, and racial-ethnic histories and social constructions of identity. In point of fact, the central category of Hervik's analysis, *catrin*, is not used in any other region than the Puuc. Contrary to his assertions, Hervik's analysis does not have validity in the rest of the Yucatán peninsula. Just as Robert Redfield's books on Yucatán profoundly shaped the understanding of Maya identity across the academic world, Hervik's book has come to shape and inform the general academic understanding of Maya identity due to the marketing success of this book. Anthropologists and other social scientists who know little about Yucatán may assign this in their courses on Mexico, Latin America, or Indigenous identity, and thereby come to believe that Hervik's model of Maya identity is valid throughout the whole of Yucatán when in fact it is not beyond the villages of this region. There is an extensive ethnographic literature about the complications of identity "as Maya" that are based on many different communities in many other regions of Yucatán. This literature demonstrates that there are dramatically different categories and constructions of identity and sentiments of being Maya. The propagation in second-

ary literature of the "Hervik model of Maya identity" as THE model of Yucatec Maya identity has become alarming indeed. See Castañeda 2004b and especially the chapters by Mathew Restall, Wolfgang Gabbert Ben Fallaw, Paul Eiss, Juan Castillo Cocom, Patricia Fortuny Loret de Mola, and Ueli Hostettler in Castillo Cocom and Castañeda 2004 for counter views.

19. I have extensively elaborated this idea in previous publications, Castañeda 1995, 1996, 1997.

20. Miller 1985, Desmond and Messenger 1988.

21. See Castañeda 1996, 1997, 2003, 2009, and Peraza López, Rejón Patrón, and Piña Loeza 1987.

22. See Castañeda 2004a.

23. The sociopolitical history of the artisans, the handicraft markets, and heritage tourism are large issues not directly pertinent to this discussion of the aesthetic styles of the art. For those who are interested in this aspect please consult my other publications (Castañeda 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a,b, 2009).

24. Wilberth Serrano is one artist who is particularly cognizant of the significance of Barrera Rubio's statement in triggering the shift from *chac moolero* to artisan and my own role in enabling artisan self identification as artists. See Castañeda 2004a, 2005a, 2005b for details.

25. Castañeda, Fumero Armstrong, Breglia 1999, Castañeda 2004a, 2005a, 2005b. See www.osea-cite.org/history and especially www.osea-cite.org/history/ahdzib.php.

26. Alcoholism also greatly diminished in the community in general and specifically among artisans. This is due to the crackdown of civil authorities on public intoxication and drinking over the last 20 years, but also to widespread recognition that income from tourism is in fact hard earned, that it can evaporate instantly. The artisans, especially those who commercialize nonlocal handicrafts, now comprise a visible majority of the middle and upper economic classes of the community. Perhaps it is the fate of the vocation of the artist to remain poor, but the majority of those I consider artists have not gotten onto the economic escalator that is represented by the Chichén market. They tend to retain a class standing that is referred to in regional terms as *humilde*, "humble."

27. On art-writing and related concepts of art-world/s and art-culture system, see Carrier 1987, Danto 1964, Becker 1982, and Marcus and Myers 1995, Clifford 1988. On the design of the ethnographic research projects as a mode of art-writing, see Castañeda 2004a, 2005a, 2005b.

28. Castañeda 2005b. The dominant reading of Benjamin's

famous slogan that the aura of art (or authenticity) “withers away” is that it completely disappears or erodes. Yet, such a reading is too easy and contrary to obvious empirical reality as a number of critics have noted. The maintenance of the value of the “original” is quite dependent upon the materiality and technologies of the initial production. Thus, although Benjamin uses the idea of identical reprints of a photograph having destroyed the aura of the original, he failed to account for the materiality of the negative. Even in digital photography, the initial file image, with its specific technological qualities, has a unique status even if it can be multiplied in identical reproductions. Further, Benjamin later in his text explains in less aphoristic and more analytical terms that the basis of the aura changes from (non-modern, non-capitalist) “tradition” to (modern) “politics.” I suggest that Benjamin is using this latter word to reference the politics of capitalist economy, its relations of production, marketing and consumption (see also Castañeda 2000a). Aura of art is contestable negotiation dependent upon the forces that are struggling to define aesthetics, value, and consumption.

29. There is an ever expanding anthropological literature on tourist and ethnic arts, their politics, production, marketing, distribution, curation, values and glass ceilings, relationships to imagining nations, ethnic/indigenous identity formation, and art-world. As well anthropologists have conducted participatory, action, and applied research with communities of properly qualified traditional artisans and artists throughout the world. For a sampling of work I suggest: Graburn (1976, 1984), Clifford (1988, 1997), Mullin (1995, 2001), Marcus and Myers (1995), Errington (1998), Myers (2003), Little (2004), Wood (2008), Chibnik (2003), Price (2001), Steiner (1994, 1999).

30. I include the batik painting of cloth and t-shirts within the greater concept of Pisté Maya art (see example Castañeda 2004a 35, fig. 5, 36, fig. 6). It was first introduced to a Pisté wood carver who produced it in his house in Pisté and sold to a retailer located in Playa del Carmen. Early in the 1980s Juan Gutierrez, from Puebla, México, moved to Pisté and further developed the art. As a gifted painter, he has devoted himself to the production of batik for the tourism markets of the region. Other locals picked up the art in a part time manner, but not with a long lasting dedication. Rather, the art of silk-screening t-shirts has been the primary Pisté alternative to wood and stone carving. Nonetheless, the art of Maya batik was developed in Pisté and alongside the art of carving. However, given the focus of the exhibition and this book, I do not comment further on any aspect of this art.

31. Examples of the Dios de Maíz (Corn God) from 1989 are the fourth, sixth, eighth, and eleventh statues from the left in fig. 2, page 26 in Castañeda 2004a.

32. See Castañeda 2004a, 28, fig. 4 and third statue from the right Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2.

33. There are three traditional Chac Mool figures carved in stone (see discussion below) from 1985 in Castañeda 2004a, 27 fig. 3. The other Chac Mools in this illustration are creative hybrids called *inventados*. See the Chac Mool figure carved in *chakah* (from 1989) sitting atop the fourth statue (a Corn God) from the left Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2.

34. See the feather serpent in the middle of Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2 and on the left hand corner of the table in Castañeda 2005a, 91, fig. 2.

35. Compare Chable’s Ixchel and Dios de Maiz in Castañeda for 2005a, 89, fig. 1.

36. Examples of the Young Corn God from 1989 are the fifth and seventh statues from the left in fig. 2, page 26 in Castañeda 2004a. From the same year is the Corn God on the far right of the table in fig. 3 Castañeda 2005a 91. The tassels of corn rise up and illustrate the two colors, reddish brown and dirty yellow, of the *chakah* wood. Also in this illustration is a Young Corn God in profile carved in *máscara* form, third statue from left Castañeda 2005a, 91, fig. 3. A more realistic versus representational carving that dates to 1999 is seen in Castañeda 2005a, 98, fig. 8.

37. See Castañeda 2005a, 89, fig. 1.

38. See examples in Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2, 27, fig. 3.

39. See unpainted figures from late 1980s in Castañeda 2005a, 91, fig. 3, 2004a, 26, fig. 2.

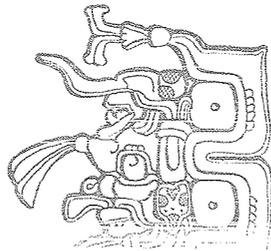
40. It was interesting to watch tourists pick up a big piece of carved *piich* only to discover that it weighed significantly less than anticipated. Age, hardness, color, smell, and weight are barometers of the aesthetic, economic, and market values of wood.

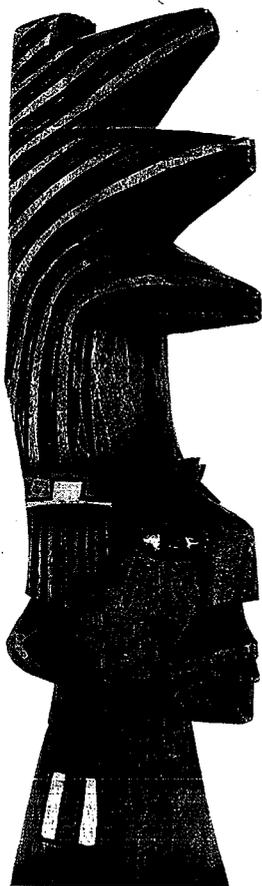
41. For examples see Castañeda 2005a, 91, fig. 3 and Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2.

42. Grabun calls this “archaism.” However, I prefer the concept of antique as the drive to make something look old in the form of either an antique or an antiquity, which reference either a colonial historical period (say sixteenth through nineteenth centuries) or an archaeological time frame, respectively. Thus, antique is more appropriate given that the archaeological antiquities i.e., the pre-Columbian antiquities of the Maya are in fact the literal model, inspiration, and meaning-concept of all the artwork.

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43. Barbesh and Taylor 1993.
44. See discussion in Castañeda 2004a, 27–29.
45. See Giliberto's original 1993 *acabado* and painting in Castañeda 2004a, 28, fig. 4 and variations including monochrome dark and light tones as well as painted *acacabados* in Castañeda 2004a 37, fig. 7, Castañeda 2005a, 94 fig. 6, 96 fig. 8, and in the Pisté pieces exhibited in this catalog.
46. See the first three statues on the left in Castañeda 2004a, 26, fig. 2 and the three *máscaras* in the forefront leaning against the display table in Castañeda 2005a, 91, fig. 3.
47. See Castañeda 2005a, 94, fig. 6.
48. See Bhabha 1994, Young 1994.
49. Garcia Canclini 1993, 1995. See also Coombes 1994, Krasniuwaskas 2000, Coombes and Brah 2000, Young 1994.
50. See Scott and Kowalski, this volume.
51. There is no time to delve into a robust review of the contentious debates about the nature kitsch and varieties of theories of kitsch and its relation to modernity. Two key sources that have informed my thinking is Calinescu (1987) and Toulmin (1992).
52. Danto 1964; Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993; Dubin 2001; Clifford 1988; Greenblatt 1991; Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairne 1999.
53. See Kowalski, Steiner, Berlo, this volume.
54. "Smoking mirror" references the magic reflective stone that is used by ritual specialists, gods, magicians, and especially the Mexican trickster figure of Tezcatlipoca. There is evidence of smoking mirror representations in the Maya world as well.
55. For a sampling of these issues see Geismar (2001), George (1999), Price (2001), Marquis (1991), Rushing (1995), Steiner (1996, 1999), Marcus and Myers (1995), Myers (2003), Chibnik (2003), Phillips and Steiner (1999), Welsch (2004).





5.2—Pakal as Young God Corn. Two interpretations of Lord Pakal from Palenque as the Young Corn God by the same artist, Gilberto Yam Tun. The figure on the left illustrates the newly invented *acabado* that Gilberto developed in the early 1990s and the rudimentary/rústico style of the 1980s. The figure on the right was commissioned for the 1999 exhibit in the Durand Art Institute and illustrates Gilberto's growing mastery as a carver. Cedar with a yellowish flesh tone *acabado*. Collection of Quetzil Castañeda.

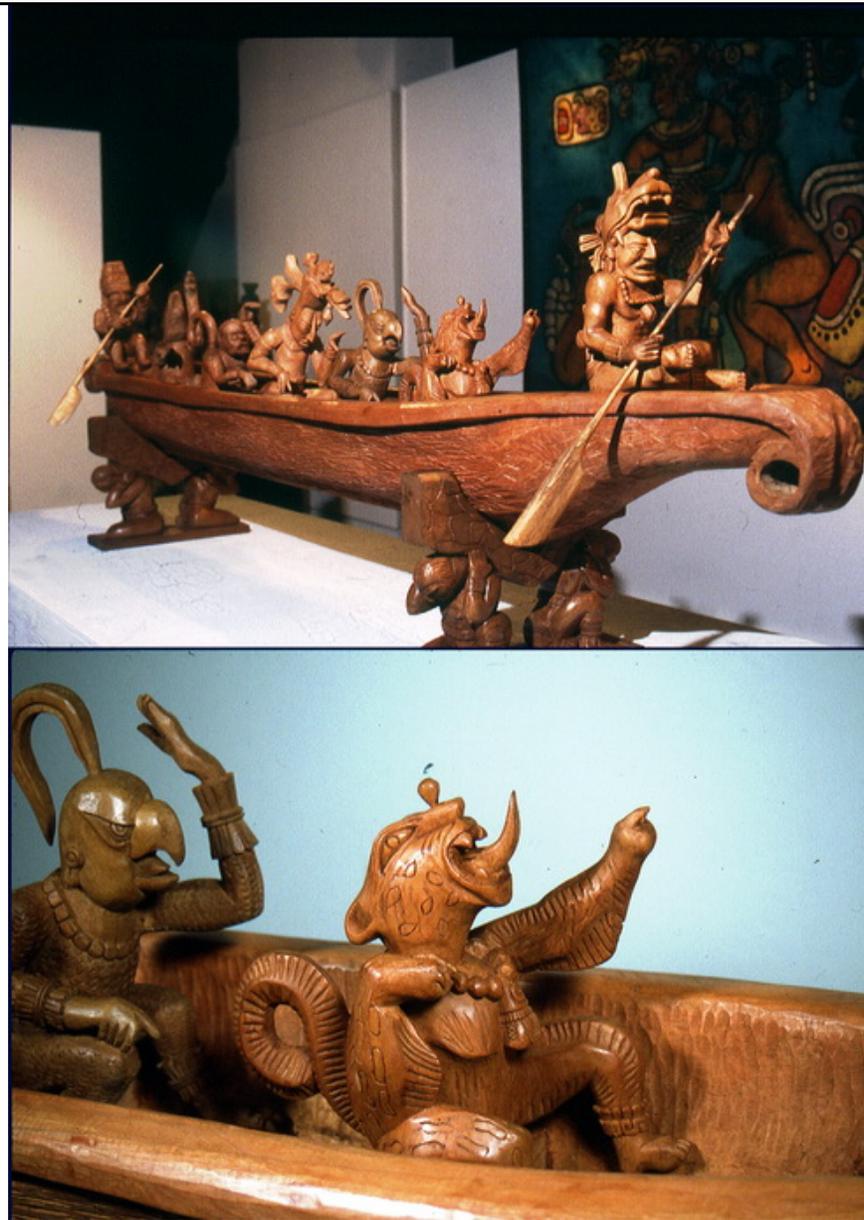


Figure 1. The Tikal Death Canoe.

This piece was commissioned for the 1999 exhibit, “Modern Maya Art in Ancient Traditions” held in the Durand Art Institute. It is an interpretation of the death voyage of King “Double Comb” to Xibalba or Underworld, which was carved as a two-dimensional image on a set of bones deposited in the Tomb of Ah Kakaw (Tikal Burial 116). The King is accompanied by animal guardians, a monkey, dog, iguana, and parrot, who hold their wrist to forehead in a gesture of death. The canoe is guided by two gods, the Paddler Twins. The entire piece is finished with an earthy orange brown acabado with different shades and tones on each of the figures and pedestals. The canoe itself is 2 meters long, 28cm wide, and 16cm deep. The two pedestals are made from separate pieces of wood and are 27 cm high, 11cm wide, 32 cm long. The seated figures are 12 cm x 14cm at base with variable height up to 25 cm high for the rowers and 34 cm high for the king, including the seat. Four artists collaborated to create this piece, José-León Tuz Kituc, Jorge Enrique Pool Cauch, Gilberto Yam Tun, Wilbert Serrano Mex, 1999.



Figure 2. Pakal as Young God Corn

Two interpretations of Lord Pakal from Palenque as the Young Corn God by the same artist, Gilberto Yam Tun. The figure on the left illustrates both the newly invented acabado that Gilberto developed in the early 1990s and the rudimentary/rústico style of the 1980s. The figure on the right was commissioned for the 1999 exhibit in the Durand Art Institute and illustrates Gilberto's development in carving mastery. Cedar painted in a yellowish flesh tone acabado.

<insert fig. 3 approximately here. close up of carving details>



Figure 3. close up carving details

This close up of an Ixchel statue illustrates the intricacy of the Pisté aesthetic. In this piece the artist has carved the fingers, feet/sandals, and muscle mass of the legs in representational realism versus an anatomically correct depiction. There are design patterns that can be found on animals, clothing and human bodies. When on the body these can be viewed as types of (iconographic) tatoos. One can see the design patterns of the quincunx (knee), a geometric “G” sign or fret (on the bowl and upper thigh), a wavy decorative-tattoo line (thigh, forearm, side of foot), and an inverted quincunx or star-sign (bowl), diamonds on the sandal straps, and double squar corner (at elbow to right). Note also the cut lines on the clothing. Chakah in painted acabado, artist unknown, 2002.



Figure 4. Sacerdote Maya by Ramón Quijano Balam

This Sacerdote Maya is technically meticulous with exceptionally delicate details and a vibrant painting that compliments and completes the carving. Note the patterns of cut to create tattoos, clothing, armbands, leg bands, hair, feathers, corn, earspools, glyphs, decorative lines on blank space. Contrast the precision and sensibility of the face, toes, and fingers, however, with the absence of any attempt to give accurate shape, form or mass to the body, e.g., the chest. Contrast both of these elements to the realist details of the feathered serpent (7cm high, 2.54 cm wide, 1cm deep) which is shown with the white scales of the underbelly, the top side design patterns of rattlesnakes, and the feathering curl at corners of the mouth. This combination of attention and lack of attention to “accuracy” is typical of Pisté representational realism. It is where artists are distinguished from Pisté artisans. Pìch in painted acabado, 33cm high and 8cm x 7cm at base. Ramón Quijano Balam, 1999.



Figure 5. Jaguar-Feathered Serpent Throne, artist unknown

This Feathered Serpent-Jaguar Throne is perfectly executed realism and acabado that predominated the 1990s. Chakah with painted acabado, 34 cm long x 9.5 cm wide x 17 height. Artist unknown, 2003.



Figure 6. close up of Maya faces

This close up of Maya, left from an ídolo, right from a mascarón, both from 1999, illustrate the stern, somber, perhaps angry or aggressive expressions. The Pisté artisans have developed a particularly engaging face and features. The strength of an artisan is often gauged by the quality of their faces, their Maya nose, and the vividness of expression. As a rule, the artisans do not use any laughing, smiling, or otherwise cheerful, or explicitly humorous faces. Their humor is always serious parody typical of kitsch.



Catalog_QC01_Archer.jpg

El Arquero, the Archer. This central figure of this work playfully derives from Mexican calendar art (circa 1950s) which in turn is a kitsch copying of late Colonial period romanticist painting of Aztec mythological figures. The archer is Cuahtemoc, the Aztec Hero King, while the Maya Princess is derived from the cartoon cover of an issue of the Mexican novela, a raunchy-romantic popular literature distributed in cheap newsprint books. These two figures are on top of a stylized double headed serpent bar or ceremonial scepter bar. The entire composition is carried on the backs of two slave-captives or cargadores who are crouching on their knees from their burden. Cedar tabla in a light orange-brown acabado, 67cm high, 38cm wide, 5.5cm thick. José León Tuz Kituc, 1999.



Catalog_QC02_Tabla_L8.jpg

Capture Scene from Yaxchilan Lintel 8. The thickness of the carving dates this piece to the same period as the Archer. Note the deep relief combined with the smoothness of the human form. In contrast to other Pisté artists, José León prefers a less “baroque” aesthetic in terms of details. Unpainted cedar tabla, 37cm high, 38 wide, 5cm thick. José León Tuz Kituc, circa mid to late 1990s.



Catalog_QC03_BridJag.jpg
Tabla of Bird Jaguar
Bloodletting. Replica carving of
based on the figure of king of
Yaxchilan Bird Jaguar
conducting bloodletting on
Lintel 2 from La Pasadita. This
piece was sold by Gabiel Uc
from Pisté and expresses the
tabla style of carving that a
number of Pisté artisans began
to develop. 80 cm high, 34 cm
wide, 2.5 cm thick. Artist
unknown.



Catalog_QC04_Kukulcan.jpg
Gloria de K'uk'ulkan. This piece illustrates the Tajín-style of bas-relief which is evident in the carving of the human figure in a representational style of the body's muscles and shapes. The main figure holds K'uk'ulkan (feathered serpent). Kneeling in front is a woman offering a bowl of incense; above, two figures face each other, one a priest with a headdress out of which emerges the Young Corn God, the other protagonist receiving an offering of Vision Serpent. A feathered serpent emerges from his headdress. This tabla is in a dark red-brown acabado, 70 cm high, 28 cm wide, 1.6 cm thick. Wilbert Serrano Mex, 1999.



Catalog_QC05_Chac-LadyZacKuk.jpg

This mascarón is inspired by the figure of Lady Zak Kuk from the Oval Palace Tablet of Palenque, but is here shown holding up as if an offering a miniaturized figure, perhaps Pakal, while a feathered serpent flies in the air above. This composition is situated on top of the head of a Chaak (Rain God) mask, which is typical of the Yucatán Maya region, especially at Chichén and Puuc sites. A pair of glyphs with the zero calendar date of the Maya Long Count, are placed to the right and left of the feet of Lady Zak Kuk. Below the glyphs, which are not presented in a typical Classic Maya format, the artist has written the corresponding dates in Roman numbers and alphabet, “4 Ahau” and “8 Cumku.” This figure therefore combines three distinct Maya cultural icons together into one artwork that is in turn also a hybrid cross between máscara and mascarón. Chakah in a burgundy red brown acabado, 65cm high, 21cm, wide, 10cm curve at deepest diameter (curl nose extends an additional 7cm). Artist Jorge Enrique Pool Cauch, 1999.



Catalog_QC06_idolo
Yum Dzak, Dios de
Medicina, in mascarón, with
Xipe Totec headdress in
which two yellow spotted
jaguars form a base with a
slave-cargador for the Corn
God protected by Kukulcan
(left top) and a priest
offering (right top). The
central image representing
Xipe Totec, which derives
from the ceramic lid of a
bowl from Burial 10 at Tikal
(Tzakol culture period), is
painted in the Teotihuacan
style of Central México.
The use of bright yellows,
multiple reds, and distinct
blues makes the red-based
painted acabado stands out
against the more
characteristic Pisté acabado
based in deep reds and
browns. This piece
therefore evokes a
“Mexican” multicolored
folkloric aesthetic, which is
already signaled by the
Teotihuan style Xipe Totec.
40cm high, 17cm, wide, 9
cm, thick. Alfonso Cetz
Címe, 1999.



Catalog_QC07_jade-mask

Balam Ahau, Jade Mask of Jaguar King. This mask represents an artistic innovation that began the artist initiated in 2002-03. The smooth face of the face is carved in geometric or other designs and painted before the application of the chapopote acabado. This technique creates the effect of jade mosaic. The headdress consists of a double headed feathered serpent bar with glyph signs taken from niche carvings on the Venus Platform, Chichén Itzá. Emerging from the serpent bar is a yellow jaguar head, on top of which is seated a Maya man, to his right are three figures kneeling in a row and to his left is a Maya priest in Chac Mool position with Kukulcan (feathered serpent) flying above the scene of sacrifice. The artist's use of the jade-mosaic technique and the figural headdress was so thoroughly copied and imitated that it transformed the Pisté art scene and the aesthetics of masks beginning in this decade. Cedar in painted acabado, 34cm high, 21 cm wide, 13cm deep. Artist, José Mitch Dzib, 2003



Catalog_QC08_idolo
Yum Dzak, Dios de Medicina, in idolo with yellow jaguar headdress, Kukulcan, jaguar, and priest offering incense. This piece illustrates the classic Pisté acabado and painting style and the artistic innovations that occurred in the ídolo form during the late 1990s and expressed in terms of both the main figure, here seated cross-legged, and the figural headdress with miniaturized jaguars, serpents, and humans. Chakah wood with painted acabado, 43 cm high on a base 12 x 14 cm. Abelino Cemé Mex, 1999.



Catalog_QC09_Ixchel.jpg

This Ixchel is an exemplary classic of Ramón's Quijano's intricate detailed carving in small statuary. Note the attention to detail in body tattooing, feathering, facial and body features (e.g., eyes, toes hair), clothing (e.g., straps on the sandals). Unpainted cedar with no acabado, 22cm, 9cm wide, 8cm deep. Artist Ramon Quijano Balam, 1999.