



MOLAS may be defined as several layers of brightly colored fabric designs built up on cotton material. Layers are hand sewn together with attractive stitches. The colors most often used are bright reds, oranges, and yellows with black used as a contrast.

Molas come from the Kuna Indians of the San Blas Islands of Panama. The Kunas are inspired by their natural world to create beautiful molas which are part of the clothes they wear. The world of the Kunas is very colorful, filled with exotic parrots and toucans, brightly colored butterflies and fish.

The development of molas as an art form began many years ago with body painting. Slowly, body painting turned into fabric painting. By the late 1800s, as fabrics became more available, sewing methods became popular. At first only 2 layers were used. Orange and black or red and black represented the choices. Later other colors and layers were added. In Cuna language, the word Mola means "blouse". Today, molas refer to any fabric panel made by the Cuna Indians. They have become much in demand by foreign markets...sometimes they are framed and enjoyed as works of art. Other times the panels are attached to items of clothing such as shirts, jackets, or bags.

Anything a Kuna woman sees or hears can become inspiration for a mola. Ideas come from the jungle and sealife that surrounds them. Other ideas come from life outside the Kuna villages, such as comic book figures, cartoons and advertisements from magazines. Some designs are geometric. Anything may spark the Kuna imagination.

*What sparks yours?*

*Paper Molas* are made from layers of colored construction paper.