Panama is a country in Central America. The native Kuna people live in the tropical coastal area. The Kuna women of Panama create brightly colored textiles called molas. Molas are a sign of independence, pride and tradition.

Ceramics are an important art of ancient Panama. These objects are made of soft clay and then hardened in an oven or fire.

**WORDSTO KNOW**

- **Patterns**
- **Past & Present:** Arts of Panama
- **Family Guide** for Ages 8+

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**Family Guide**

**Family Day: Explore the Arts of Panama**
Sat., September 20
Noon – 4 p.m.

**Museum Nights**
Thurs., November 13
6 – 9 p.m.

Visit the Harn’s calendar on our website for future programs!

**IMAGE CREDITS**

- All molas are made by the Kuna People of Panama and are from the Panama Canal Museum Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, unless noted otherwise.

**Cover, top**
- Mola with Fish-headed Pelicans

**Cover, bottom**
- Unknown, Panama
- Mola with Open-Mouth Fishes

**Inside, left page, “look”**
- Molita with Fish

**Inside, left page, “find,” top**
- Mola with Iguanas

**Inside, left page, “find,” bottom**
- Shark Design Pedestal Bowl

**Inside, right page, “jewelry,” left**
- Deer Pendant

**Inside, right page, “jewelry,” right**
- Nose Ring

**Inside, right page, “think”**
- Mola with A Mother and Child

**Back**
- Mola with Flute Players

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**What does this mola tell you about the Kuna people and where they live?**

**CLUED IN**

- **Circle the animals as you find them in the exhibition.**
- **Which animals were challenging to find? Why?**

**FIND**

- Deer
- Shark
- Crab
- Cat
- Armadillo
- Frog
- Iguana
- Scorpion
- Bird

**Word Bank**

- Panama
- Kuna
- Mola
- Ceramic
- Lost-wax casting
- Pattern
- Reverse appliqué
- Yoke
- Embroidery
- Mold

**DRAW**

Sketch what you think the other half of the mola would look like.

**1. Layered fabric cut and hemmed to reveal designs**

**2. Hand-stitched patterns on fabric**

**3. The shaped piece of a blouse fitted around the neck and shoulders**

**4. A brightly colored textile sewn by Kuna woman**

**5. Sculpted soft clay hardened by heat**

**6. A hollow container of a specific shape that adds form to material put in it**

**7. One half mirrors the other half**

**8. Smaller pieces of fabric stitched on top of a larger piece**

**9. Native people in Panama**

**10. A country in Central America**

**11. Method of making gold jewelry using a mold**

**12. A design that repeats**

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Molas may represent legends, daily life or history of the Kuna people. If you made a mola that celebrated who you are, what would you include?

1. **Baste.** Several layers of colored fabric are temporarily sewn together.
2. **Sketch.** A design is sketched on the top layer of fabric with a pencil.
3. **Cut and Hem.** The top layer is cut following the design. The outline of the fabric is folded under itself and the fold is sewn onto the next layer, hiding the stitches. (reverse appliqué).
4. **Add Detail.** Smaller pieces of fabric are sewn on top (appliqué) and hand-stitched patterns are added (embroidery).
5. **Make to Wear.** The two panels are then sewn on to a yoke, fabric that is shaped to fit around a neck and shoulders. Sleeves are added to make a blouse.

**Lost-wax casting:**
1) A wax model of a piece of jewelry is made.
2) The model is covered in clay except for a small hole.
3) The clay is heated and hardens around the wax model, melting it and creating a ceramic mold of the object.
4) The wax is poured out of the small hole and liquid gold is poured in.
5) Once it cools, the ceramic mold is broken to retrieve the piece of gold jewelry inside.

**HINT:** Kuna women start learning how to sew small molitas at a young age. They practice and take pride in this work. Over time they begin to sew larger molas and these show more detail and beauty.

**FIND** Look for the similarities between Molas and ceramics in the exhibition.
1. Several different colors
2. Shapes and colors in combinations that repeat (pattern)
3. Lines, shapes and figures are arranged the same on both sides when cut in half (balance)

Nose rings are made of cast gold or a mixture of gold and copper called tumbaga. Nose rings, like molas, are worn by Kuna women as a sign of culture. The large and detailed nose ring, located right, was likely worn by a chief to show his rank.

**THINK** Molas may represent legends, daily life or history of the Kuna people. If you made a mola that celebrated who you are, what would you include?

**LOOK** Describe what you see in the mola to the right.

Visit the Bishop Study Center to explore real molas in the Hands-on Collection and see the mola-making process, step by step.