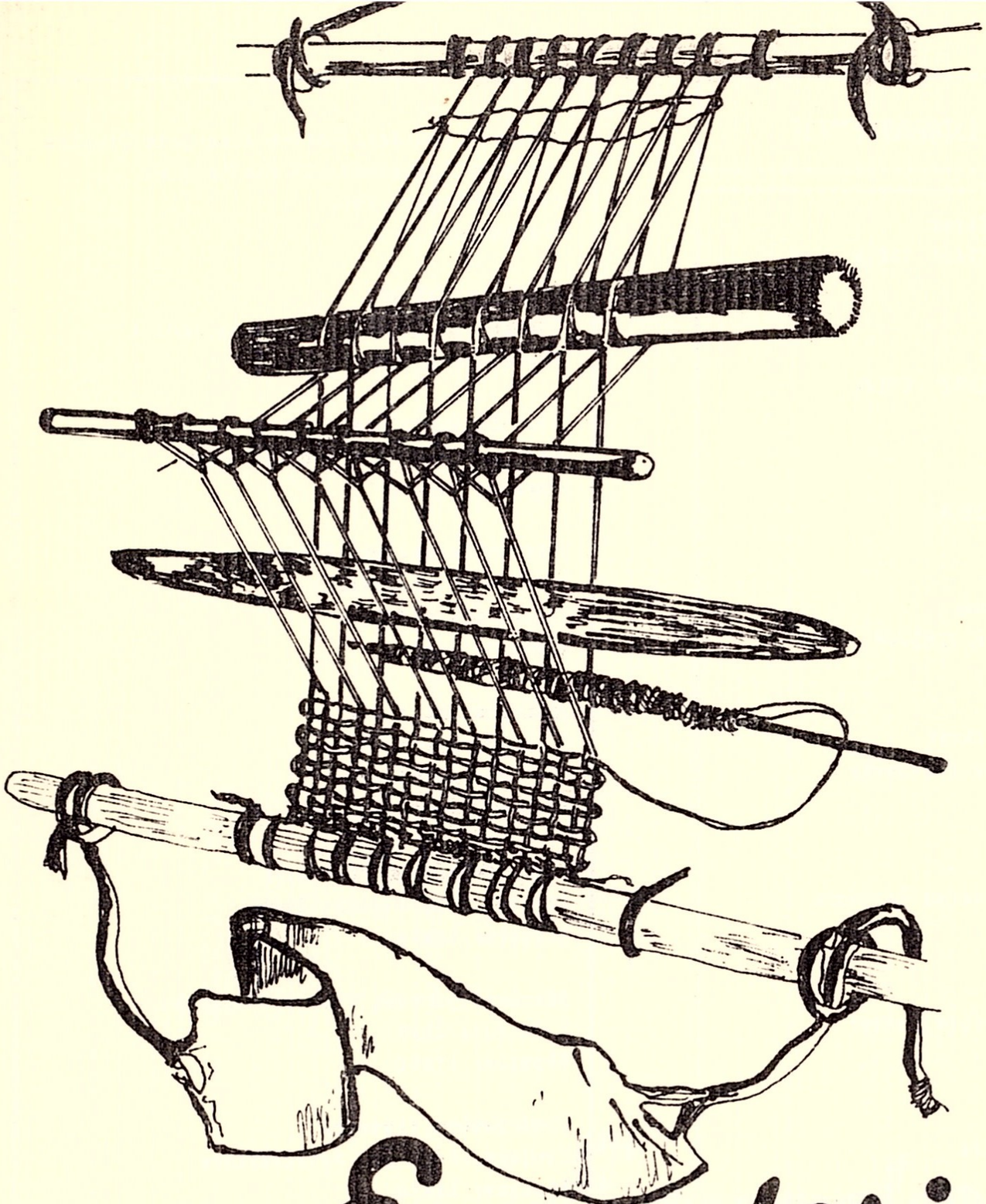

# Ecuadorian

## Fiber Folk Art Exhibit

**September-October 1981**

ECUADOR-IDAHO

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Cuenca, Ecuador

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Technical Director, CIDAP - OEA
Cuenca, Ecuador

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Cuenca, Ecuador

*Richard Boroto*
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*David Leon*
President, Quito Partners
Quito, Ecuador

Expert Ikat Weavers: *Arcelia Pérez de Fajardo*
*Angel Fajardo*

Texts: Lucía Astudillo de Cueva
Revised by: Robert Estes
Visuals and Catalogue: Samia Peñaherrera S.

*James T. Cooney,* Former Associate Director
National Association of the Partners
of the Alliance, Inc.
Washington, D.C.

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# Ecuadorian

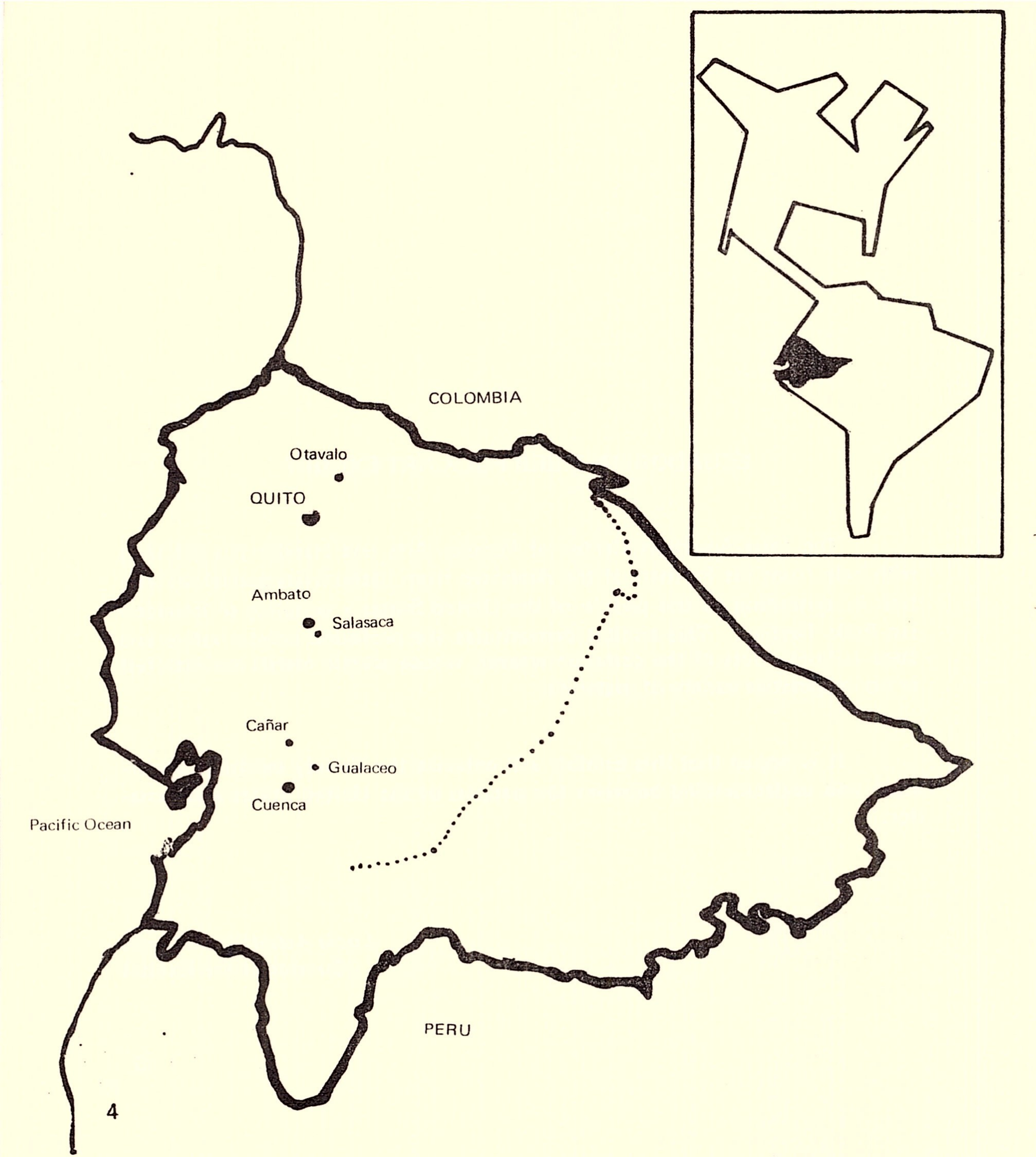
## Fiber Folk Art Exhibit

## ECUADORIAN FIBER FOLK ART EXHIBIT

The Inter-American Center of Popular Arts and Handicrafts (CIDAP) with help from the Partners of the Americas from Idaho takes special satisfaction in exhibiting to the people of the United States a sampling of Ecuadorian Folk Textiles. This exhibit demostrates the profound artistic values and deep cultural roots of the common weaver, whose artistic merits are manifest in his imaginative variety of materials.

It is hoped that this Exhibit will enhance the already existing cooperation and understanding between the peoples of the United States and Ecuador.

*Lucía Astudillo de Cueva*
Curator of the Exhibit


COLOMBIA
Otavalo
QUITO
Ambato
Salasaca
Cañar
Gualaceo
Cuenca
Pacific Ocean
PERU

# Ecuador

Ecuador is situated in the northwestern part of South America. It has an extension of 270.790 sq. km. It would seem that as it lies on the equator, it would have a homogeneously hot, tropical climate; but factors like the marine currents, the high, rugged Andean Mountains, and the changing Pacific trade winds combine to produce a variety of ecological conditions, which include the hot and rainy tropical jungle, pleasant and temperate hillsides, the perpetual snow—capped mountains and the sunny oceanside beaches.

Ecuador's official language is Spanish. The estimated population reaches 8.354.000, most of which is "mestizo" (caucasian and indian). Indians represent aproximately thirty percent of the total population. There is a small, but important black population in the Province of Esmeraldas. The Indians live mostly in the Andean Region and work in agriculture, handicrafts, and commerce.

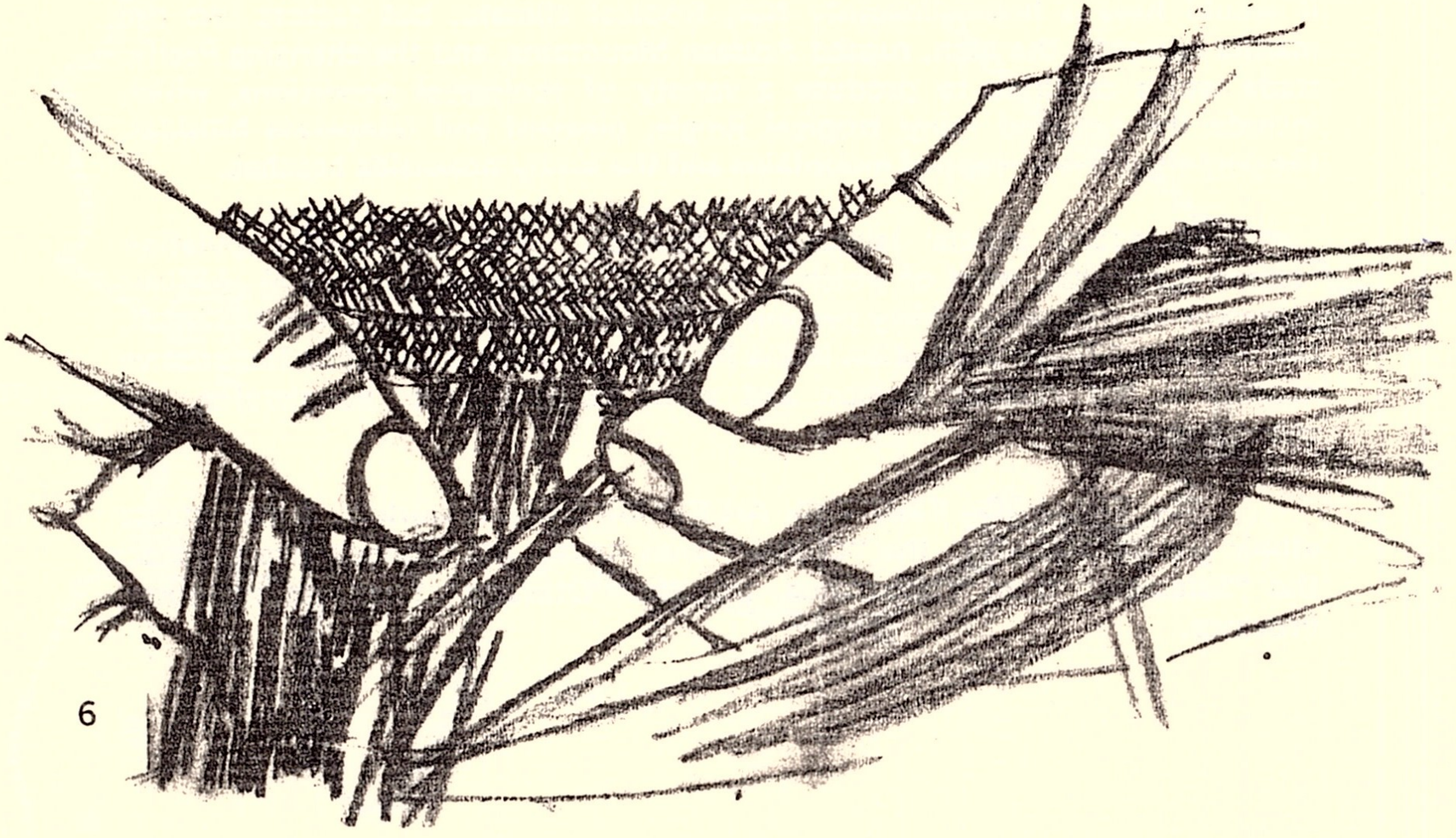
The Ecuadorian Fiber Folk Art Exhibit presents work by some notable ethnic groups; including, the "Cholos" from Azuay, the "Cañaris" from Cañar, the "Salasacas" from Tungurahua, and the "Otavalos" from the Imbabura Province.

# Toquilla Straw Hats

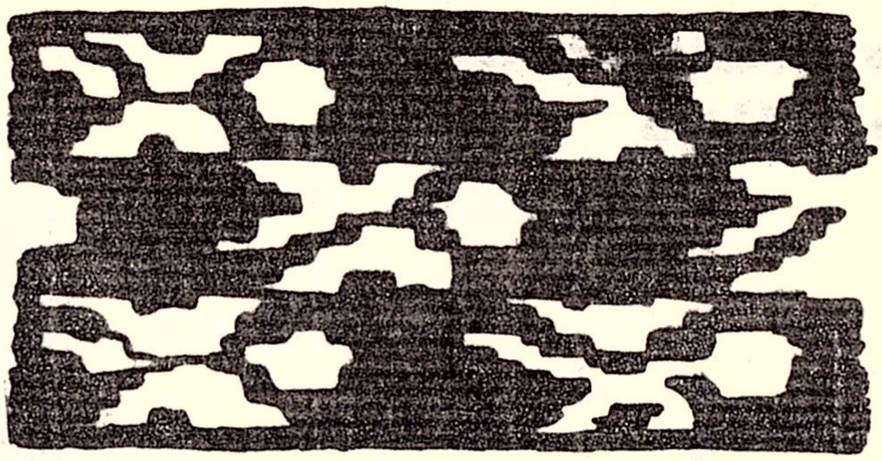
These hats are made with a very flexible material that comes from the palm tree called "Carludovica Palmata Ruiz et Pavon" popularly know in Ecuador as "toquilla straw." It grows in the tropical forests and is brought to the highlands of Ecuador to be hand woven by the indians and "cholas" in the province of Azuay and its capital city, Cuenca.

Ecuador is the primary producer and exporter of these hats, which are called "Panama Hats" because they were transported to and sold in Panama during the contruction of the Panama Canal.

On a sunny day in Cuenca one can see thousands of toquilla straw hats in the parks and along the streeets and by—ways being dried by the heat of the sun's rays.



# Ikat Weaving



The word ikat comes from the Malay language and is a method of tie—dyeing yarns that, when woven, produce patterns with characteristically blurred edges. The ikat technique varies enormously in design and materials from one region to another, according to cultural contexts that reflect the differences in the textiles produced.

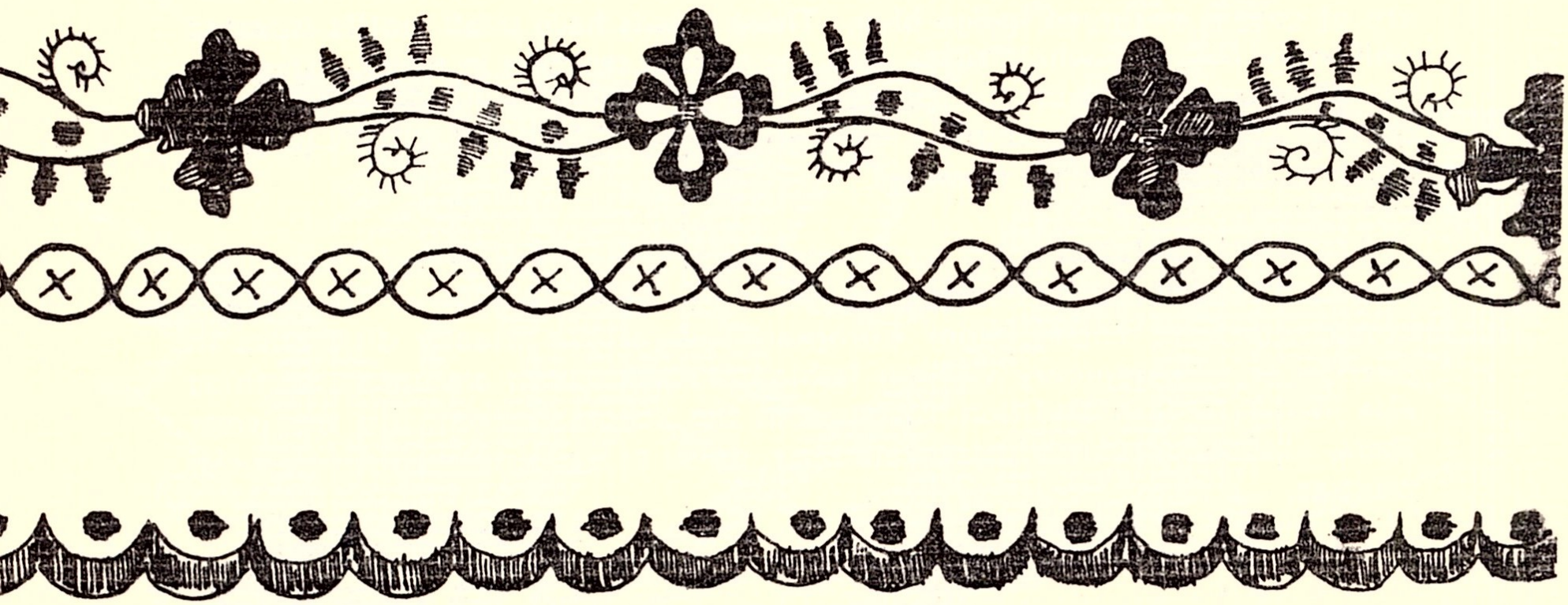
An important type of warp ikat is produced in Gualaceo, a small village near Cuenca. It involves a particular kind of woman's shawl which is rectangular and which has a long knotted fringe on each end. The most traditional are of cotton and dyed indigo blue. These shawls have small motifs repeated uniformly over the whole piece with the ground reserved in white. They are presently being made in wool, and even orlon, with colors like pink, blue, and green. The fringes are knotted with intrincate designs such as coats of arms, pigeons, flowers, and love messages.

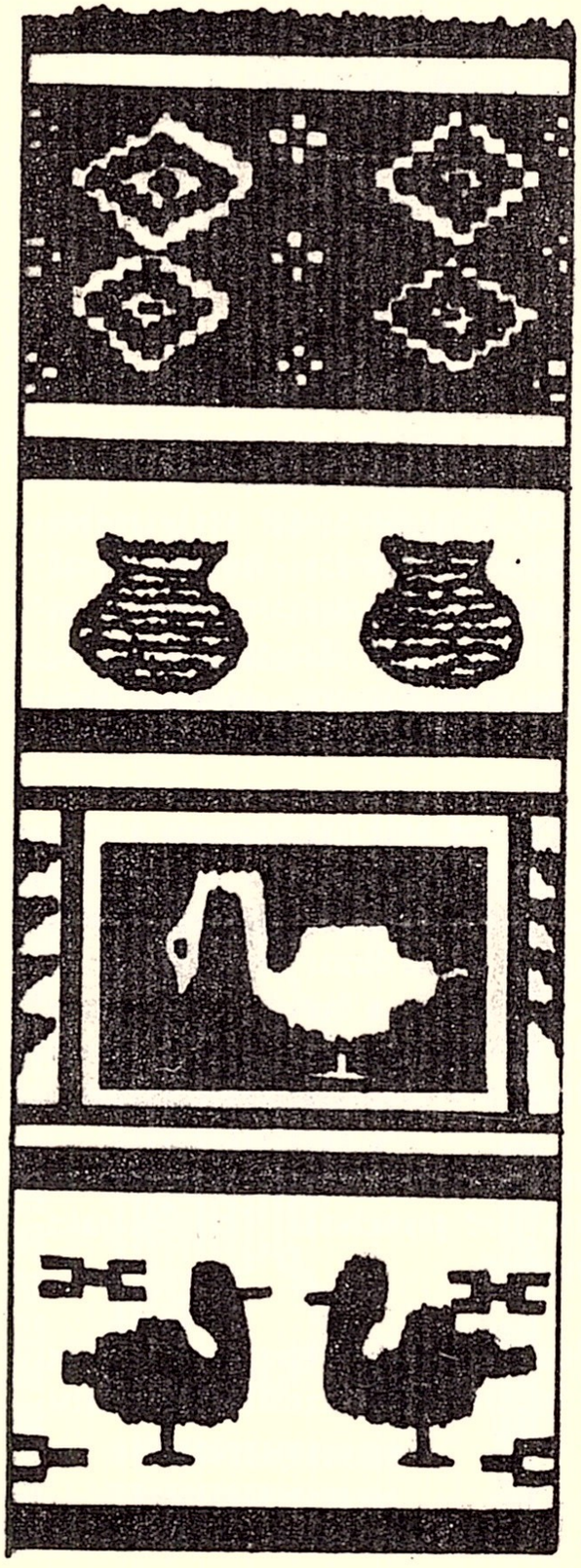
The shawls are worn by "cholas" in the Cuenca valley. "Cholas" are women of Indian descent who no longer follow native traditions. They wear a costume derived largely from European sources but usually distinctive in relation to contemporary western fashion. These shawls are unlike anything else in the Andean tradition. Women in the "chola" community who wear them, especially the more elaborate ones, do so as a means of obtaining social prestige.

# Embroidered Textiles

Traditionally, women in Cuenca have been dedicated to weaving and embroidering because it has not been until recently that women have started to work outside their homes. Embroidery is not just an idle accomplishment; it is at very least a handicraft, and at best an art. Wonderful and almost incredible pictorial effects have been obtained with the needle.

In today's world of mass-produced sterile design, there is a great market for handiwork. In Cuenca there are a few factories and numerous small shops that commercially produce blouses, dresses, etc., with a variety of designs both from traditional models and with foreing innovations.





# Belts (fajas) from Cañar

Currently, there are approximately 30,000 Quichua speaking Cañari Indians scattered throughout Cañar, the province with the highest elevation in Ecuador. The Cañari are people proud of their way of living.

The Cañari male belt is an example of the most complex weaving done in Ecuador. It is woven in the back strap loom. It is a complementary-warp textile with intricate pick-up designs and is a double-faced, reversible piece. The traditional colors are red and white or black and white. They are made with the dark color on one shed and the light color on the opposite shed of the back strap loom. The belts are made from Singer cotton sewing thread or extremely fine hand-spun wool. Occasionally, orlon is used, especially as part of the border. While a weaver can include designs of his own invention, a limited number of motifs appear on almost all the belts. These include animals, such as llamas, goats, horses, deers, and ducks.

# Otavalo & Salasaca Weavers

In a high mountain valley in the Andes of Ecuador, just sixty miles north of Quito, live 44,000 Otavalo Indians. Every Saturday, hundreds of tourists and travelers from all over the world visit the Otavalo market. In addition, Otavalo Indians travel throughout central and South America, occasionally ranging as far as the United States and Europe, selling their weavings.

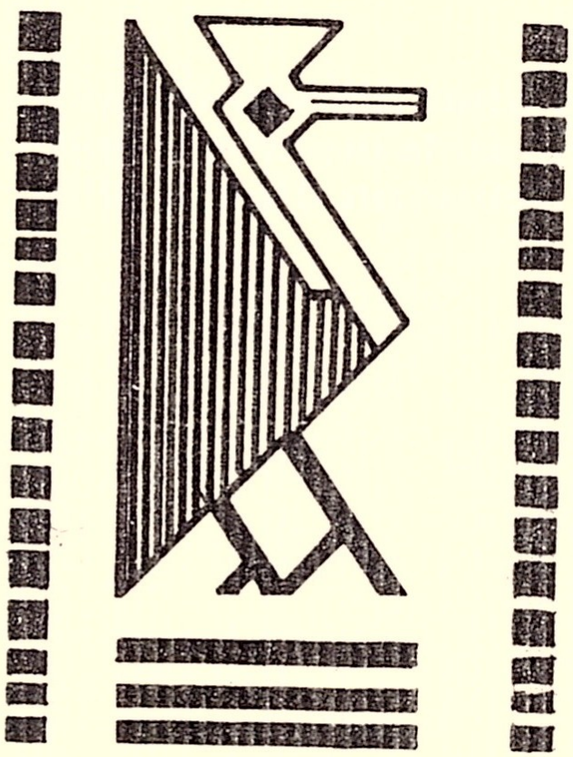
The weaving industry in Otavalo is decentralized and has become a true household industry. A typical weaving family will have two to four floor looms (along with weaving tools, warping frames, and a spinning wheel) on the open back veranda of its adobe house. Weaving on both floor and backstrap looms traditionally has been considered men's work, but in a family with many daughters or no sons, it is expected that the girls learn to weave. The children help with all aspects of textile production when they are not attending school.

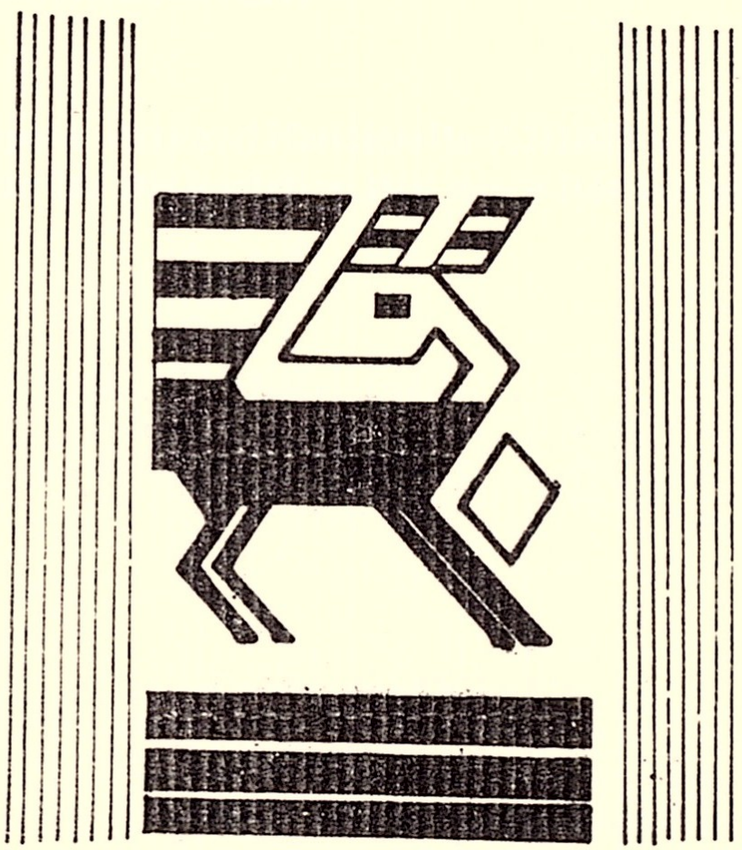
The Otavaleños are very cognizant of marketing possibilities. Some make tapestries for tourists; others weave shawls and ponchos. The Otavalo crafts market is an authentic commercial touris market.

It is important to note that the Otavaleños have shown that indigenous people can enter the national economy without loosing their cultural identity and that family-based industries are viable.

The Salasacas are a tribal community of Indians who, according to legend, vere brought from Bolivia during the Inca domination. They are very conservative in their traditions. Whoever wants to be admitted to their group must use their typical costume and speak Quichua. Any person that leaves the tribal community must stop using the black poncho.

The Salasacas are capable of producing everything they need in order to live as isolated as they do. By interchanging merchandise, they subsist without money—even in this twentieth century. Women spin their yarn from the sheep they keep. The material for their clothes are weaved in large looms. It was only in 1954 that two salasacas saw for the first time a conventional European loom in Quito. Since then they have started to use it. In 1960 Peace Corps Volunteers and the Andean Mission introduced tapestry weaving to the Salasaca Indians with great commercial success. They use a variety of designs: flowers, crosses, birds, geometric figures, etc. These tapestries are sold in the Otavalo market.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Inter-American Center of Popular Arts and Handicrafts (CIDAP) wishes to thank the Partners of the Americas for the invitation that made this exhibition in the United States possible.

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