

WARMI (SUSIE GOULDER)

Chuwas y Quipus: Pot-sculptures and Quipus

(Photographs)

Introduction

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Born in the southern highlands of Peru, Susie Goulder has chosen as her professional name a word that encapsulates the sources of her inspiration: *warmi* means “woman” in Quechua, an indigenous language of the Andes. Warmi, a woman of the Andes, makes *chuwas*, another Quechua word from the southern Andes meaning handmade earthenware bowls. *Chuwas* hold the best things in life—the most delicious food, the most beautiful flowers—but Warmi’s *chuwas* defy easy classification. Are these magnificent, sensuous works pots or sculptures, vases or women? They are, of course, both: they are vessels in the way that a woman’s body is potentially a vessel, a container of new life. They are formed of clay, the material from which, in so many origin myths, the first humans were formed. And, as in the case of the first humans, they are shaped without help from technology, by careful, loving hands, using the

traditional Andean technique of coiling. Warmi's sensitive fingers create *chuwás* out of memories, and as containers of memory.

Warmi's women are drawn from Andean history: Micaela Bastidas, the eighteenth-century revolutionary who was horribly murdered by the authorities for her role in the rebellion of 1780, led by her husband Tupac Amaru; and from literature: Doña Felipa, the charismatic ringleader of the uprising of the *chicheras** against corruption and injustice in José María Arguedas' novel *Ríos Profundos* (1956). And they are drawn from mythology, above all from Pachamama, the supreme earth-mother figure of the Andes: Pachamama, the land and the landscape, mother of the fruits of the earth, whose offspring include maize and potatoes, precious metals and clay. These children are created and nourished by Pachamama in the same way that a baby grows in the womb, is born and suckles from its mother. They owe their lives to her, and we in turn—our modern society and the world's multinational corporations—feed off her children. Pachamama also personifies the Andean women of today, who continue to be exploited by forces beyond their control. Warmi's clay figures embody ideas of motherhood, fecundity and continuity; strength, security and stoicism.

In the Andes the two outstanding art forms are pottery and textiles, both fundamental to human evolution: pots to cook and preserve food, to carry water, and to protect the bones of one's ancestors; textiles to clothe and protect the body, to carry a baby or bring in the harvest, and to dress the dead. Both have very ancient roots in the Andean region (pottery dates back about 3,500 years, weaving is perhaps 1,000 years older) and have always been used as important bearers of meaning. A new departure for Warmi is to link these arts through her exploration of a pre-Columbian tradition closely related to weaving: that of the *quipu*. Recent research into this Inca

system of record-keeping using knotted threads confirms that the *quipu* was a highly complex and sophisticated method of encoding information of a textual as well as numerical kind.** *Quipus* are, in effect, texts, but Warmi suggestively uses her modern versions as textiles, to clothe her figures in a way that alludes to the histories they embody, to the many stories told about the courage and creativity of the women of the Andes.

Traditionally Andean peoples have looked to the past to guide them into the future: the beliefs and actions of the ancestors can point the way forward. Warmi's work provides a similar bridge between past and future: it draws on the past—in terms of material and technique, form and content—but it does so in order to shine a light into the future, to demonstrate ways in which ancient knowledge can still illuminate the road ahead.

* *Chicheras*: sellers of *chica*, a beer made from fermented maize.

** The variables in the construction of a *quipu* include the raw material (llama or alpaca wool or cotton), colour, direction in which the thread is spun and plied, and the position and type of knot employed.

Warmi's Pot-Sculptures



The pot-sculptures illustrated below and other works will be exhibited at

The Gallery, Chelsea Old Town Hall,
King's Road, London SW3 5EZ, UK

from 20-25 March 2006.

Sponsors: Instituto Vida, the Embassy of Peru, and the University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art (the only public research collection in Europe dedicated to Latin American Art).



Mama Kuna: The Mothers (2004)

Qala Pachamama (Naked Earth-Mother); Qala Felipa Mama (Naked Mother Felipa); Qala Micaela Mama (Naked Mother Micaela)

Fig. 1



Pachamama Millay Wawa: Earth-Mother with Naughty Child (2005)
Figs. 2,3,4



Unquq Warmi: Pregnant (also Fed up or Fat) Woman (2004)
Figs. 5,6



Quipus Warmi: Quipu Woman/Woman with Plaits (2004)
Figs. 7,8,9



P'uynu: Aryballu/Waterpot (2005)
Fig. 10



Quipu: Quipu (2005)
Fig. 11