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Folkloric Studies Center

Traditions of Guatemala

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TOTONICAPAN: FISHES AND BIRDS OF GLAZED EARTHENWARE

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The artisan and his family.

Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez became potter since he was young, he watches and admire to his model father, Antonio Teodoro Gutiérrez, "who works 40 years in this profession and he dies to seventy fifth years old", a quarter of a century ago.

Author of whistles¹, piggy banks, candlesticks, and small dishes² for children's toys --recreator of ancient forms of glazed earthenware --, Pablo Francisco has plenty conscience about meaning his profession and his works: --" We do not have earth --he says-- we live from art,"

Blanked knitter Master's son, Antonio Teodoro always dreamed with works with pottery. He was chased by Army, "on Estrada Cabrera's times"³. He evaded military service and he earns the livelihood making shiny clay pieces. The use of conceptions and techniques transmitted in direct mode it became him to a popular artist.

To 73 years old, Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez is a truth sculptor. From molded clay for his fingers emerged the fishes and birds that to recreate for him it achieves greater proportions: ceased to be small whistles which

1. Whistles.

2. Small crockery.

3. Manuel Estrada Cabrera was a President of Guatemala Republic (1898-1920)

abundant in the markets to become larger ones or in piggy banks that that barely fit in the whole extension of one hand.

It is probably that these zoomorphic whistles have origin in esthetic prehispanic notions modifies by the colonial influence: the designs are an extremely analogous to known archaeological pieces and differ only by the glaze - green or brown-, of Spanish provenance, which characterizes the figures made by today's popular craftsmen. You remember, to purpose, the conquerors testimony about the existence of indigenous musical instruments called "trumpets and horns" which does many noises during the combats.⁴

He married with Catarina García. Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez has procreated two sons: a man and a woman. The first, according to him. His son works and likes the same profession. Francisco explains quickly: "he works after to receive his class in the town." His daughter adds "he is a teacher in Santo Tomás La Unión." To accompany in their loneliness the marriage adopted two orphaned who are part of the family nucleus and to whom he gave his surnames. As well as Juan José, the older of orphaned, like Jesús who still is a child, both work in pottery.

Catarina García de Gutiérrez also knows the clay secrets. She learns from her mother, Marta Morales who remembers her mother taught her to make whistles.

The Gutiérrez García residence is settle in the Palin neighborhood, town of Totonicapán. It is a big house which has a central yard; this is divided in two sections: left sides for the house and right side for the workshop.

The equipment

The principal work tools used for the Gutiérrez García family are the follows: flat stone, hoe, foot lathe, stone crusher and bamboo canes.

4. Bernal Díaz del Castillo. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S. A., 1955. P. 132.

4. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S. A., 1955, p. 132.



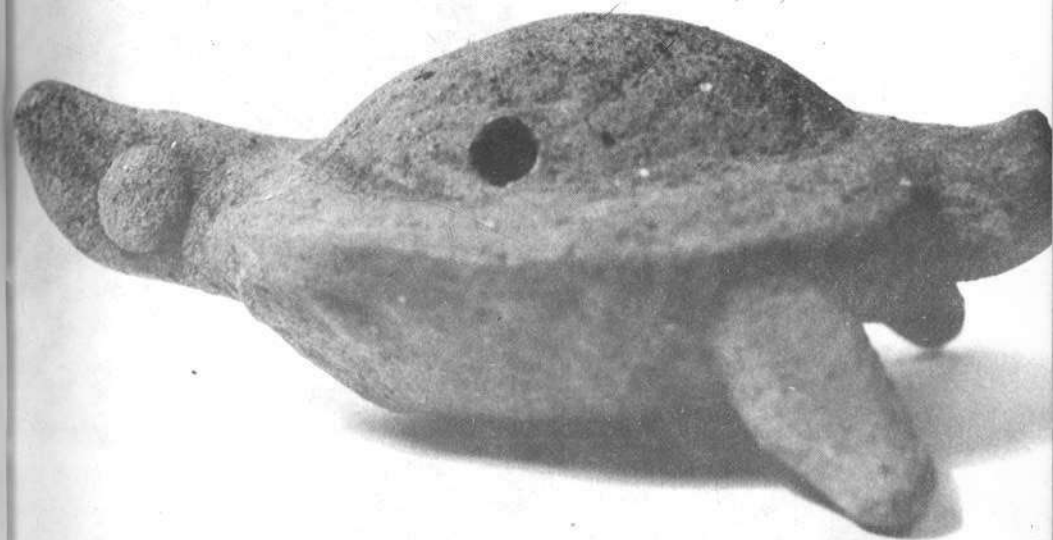
Side view of the image above. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Turtle. Cook clay whistle. Unknown origin. South Coast. Collection: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina,



Back view of the figure precedent . (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Side view of the figure above. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

The elaboration process

The raw material --white clay in clods--is purchased in Chuiboy, next spot to Totonicapán. The clay is pulverized by means of a flat stone then tuned with wire mesh strainer and wooden framework. Then it is mix with water for made the balls of wet clay which will serve of paste for the molding.

In the case of the whistles the molding is completely handmade. The small dishes and candlesticks are made in foot lathe. The hole where blow whistle it open with helps of bamboo cane called *borbal*, and such activity



Parrot. Cook clay whistle. Origin: Kaminal Juyú. Culture: Classic Maya.
Collection: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnografía. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

the clay is “neither watery nor hard”. – “For a small --sound, says Juan Jose-- a small stick is used” And for a bigger sound --he continues--“the hole is made by pure calculation.”

Finished the modelling of objects dry in the shade, and about whistles is time to glued the head. Then these are finished to dry in the sun.

The next step is the burn or cooking. The craftsmen call *jagüeta* (jagüeta is type of firing with pine firewood) jagüeta is made within brick kiln.

To prepare the glazed is crushed portions of lead and copper oxide in a mill constituted by a circular sink and wooden shaft hand-operated in the depth move two big stones



Frontal view of the figure above (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

Above view of precedent figure. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Pelican. Cook clay whistle. Origin: Uaxactún, Plaza E. Oriental part of Zanja E.W., lower floor.
Collection: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etonología. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

or turtles. These milled oxides are strained through a piece of blanket and save it in his totally milled, in deposits that craftsmen called bells. There is where the pieces, hold for the lower part, are immerse until covered from varnish which produced by the lead and copper oxides.

Finished this step the pieces are burned by second time or that the same, then there are bring to the carry. This is the end step of process and this step the object get out glazed in green or brown colors.



Above view of precendet figure. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez, Catarina García and their adopted sons: Juan José and Jesús and other children, (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

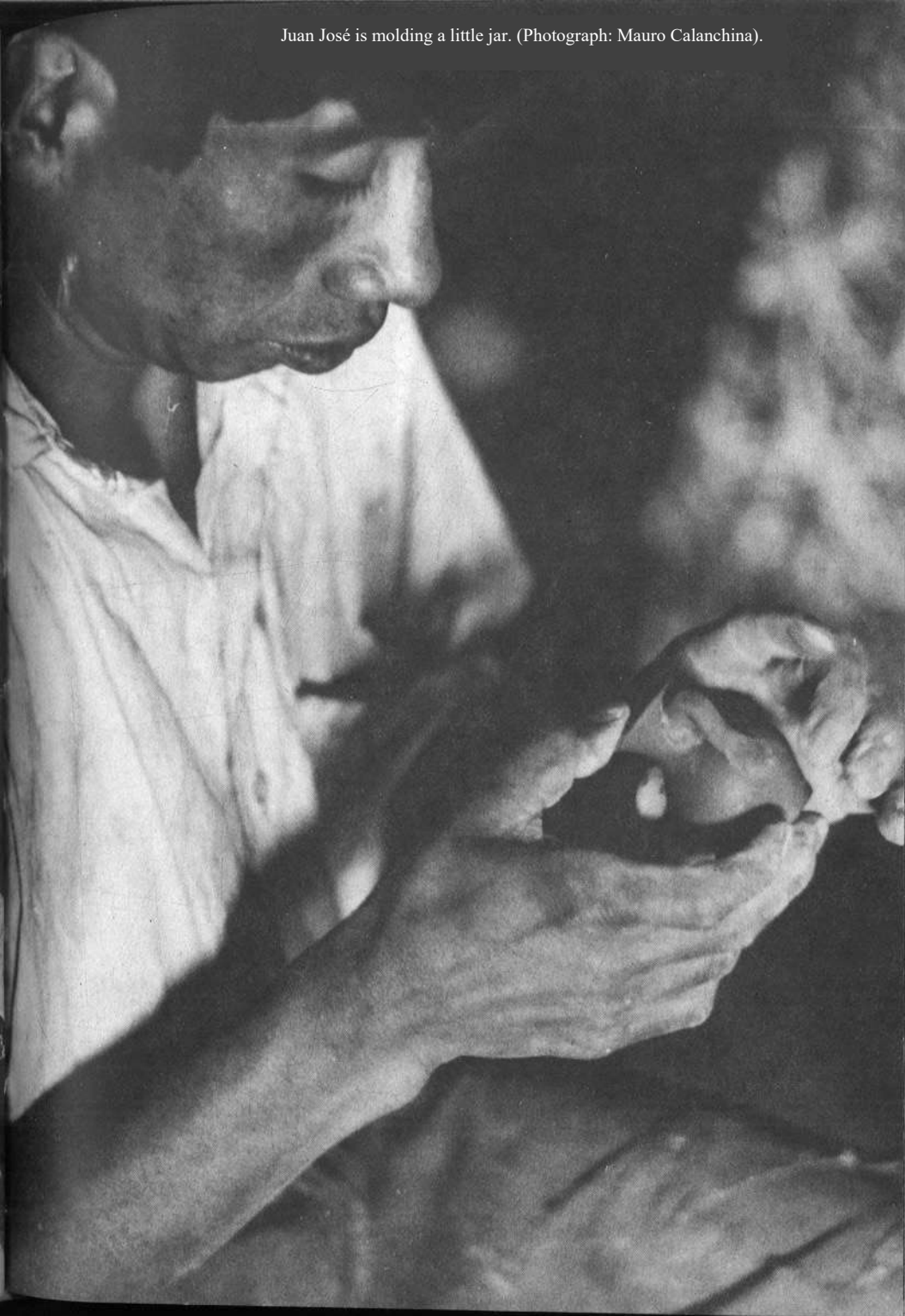
The work system

In the whistle elaboration participated two people: Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez made the bodies and Catarina, his wife, made the heads. In case of small dishes participated Juan José and Jesús, the two orphans, the first work in the foot lathe. At times Catarina cooperates in coat the pieces within of bells. However, her wife insists to pointing that is a work for men and only some times the women help. Such thing happen – she adds—When she has not work.

Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez, Catarina García, their adopted sons
and other children in his house yard.
(Photograph: Mauro Calanchina)



Juan José is molding a little jar. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



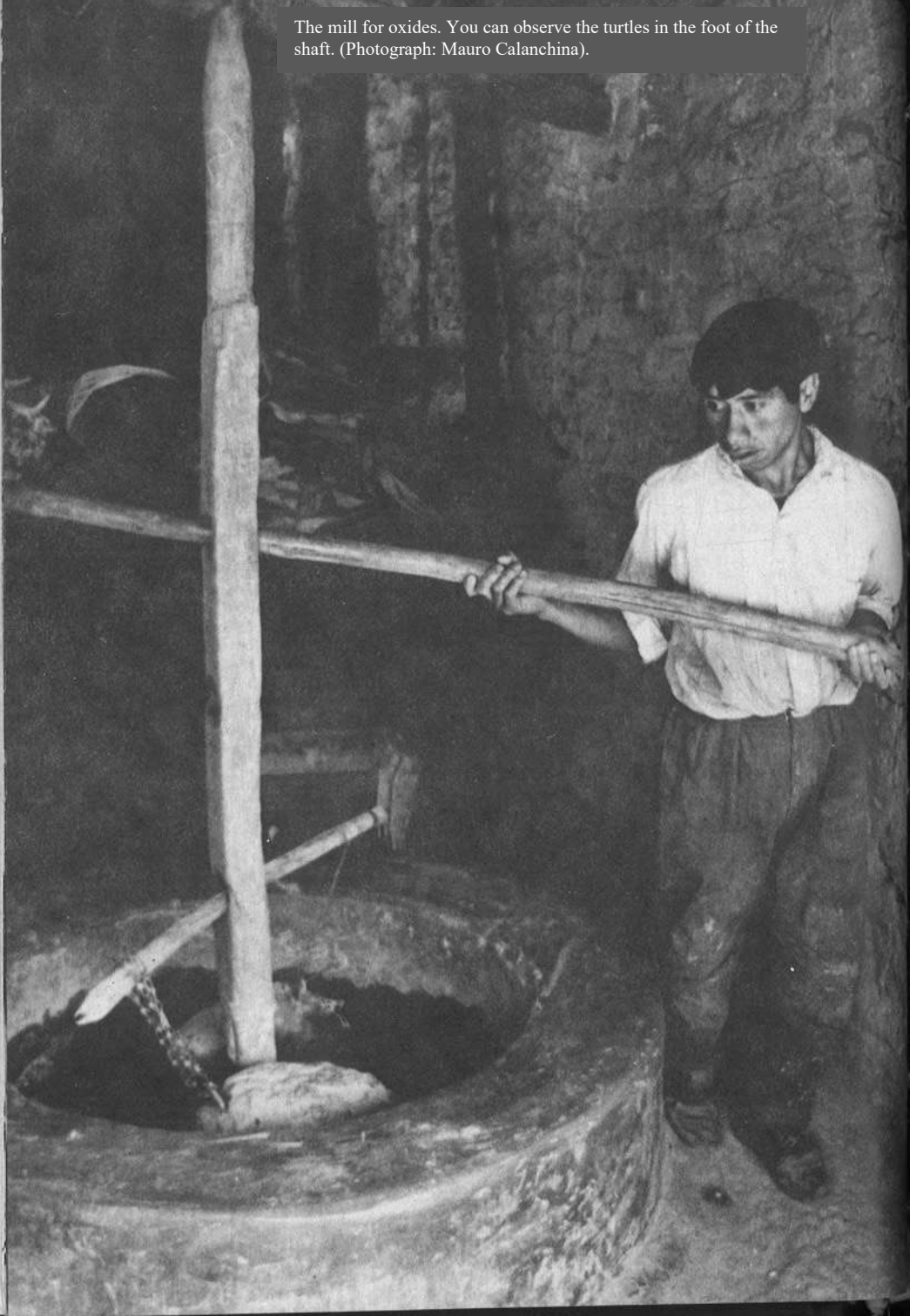
He is opening an above hole of whistle. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



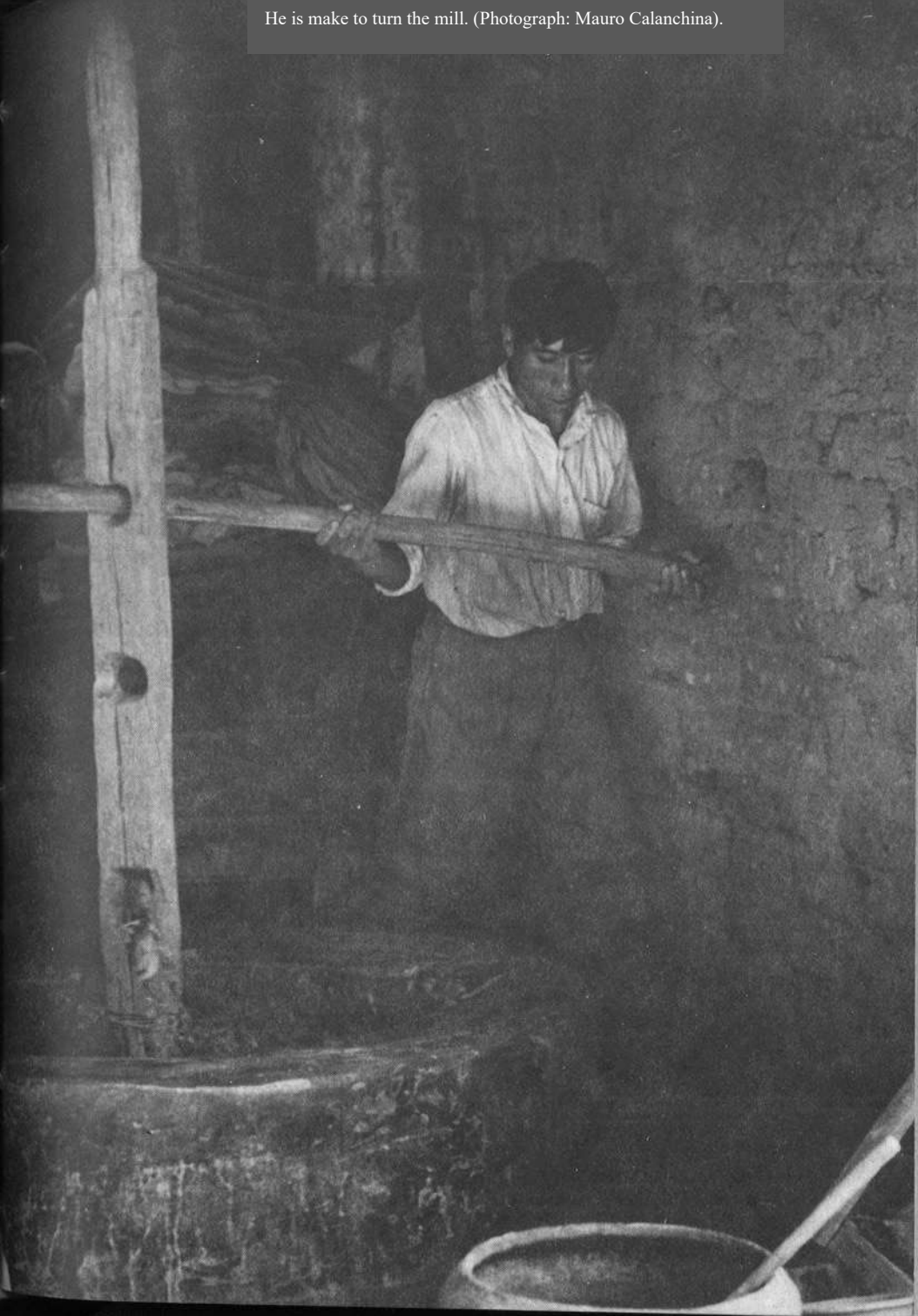
He puts a ear to a little jar. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



The mill for oxides. You can observe the turtles in the foot of the shaft. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



He is make to turn the mill. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

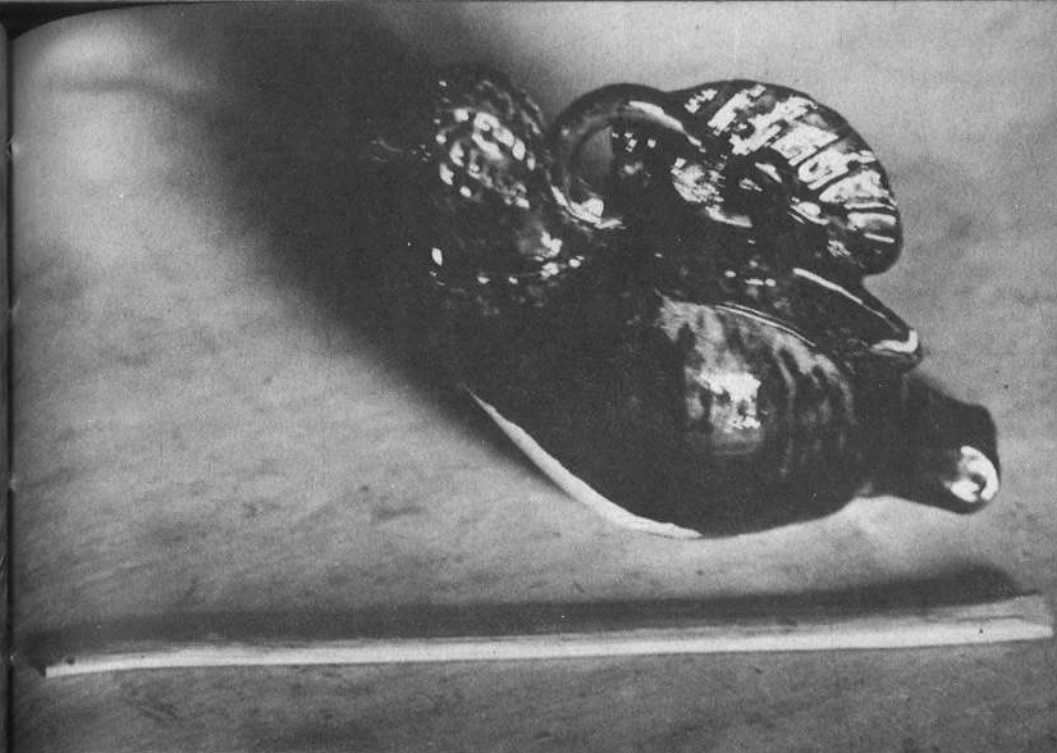




A whistle in elaboration process together *borbal*. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

The product

In addition, piggy banks and giants whistles with birds and fishes form – the small whistles and small dishes mentioned above are real creation of Pablo Francisco--, the family craftsmen workshop made candlesticks of several sizes and styles glazed. Their fishes and birds, says Pablo Francisco, that dated almost ten or fifteen years ago.



Bird. Glazed whistle. To side the *Borbal*. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

The distribution

The objects elaborated are sold in direct form to the clients. There is not production destined for market. The 144 small pieces cost Q.1.50 quetzals even and the big pieces cost Q. 3.00 quetzals even. The giants whistles and piggy banks cost Q. 0.50. each.

Final considerations

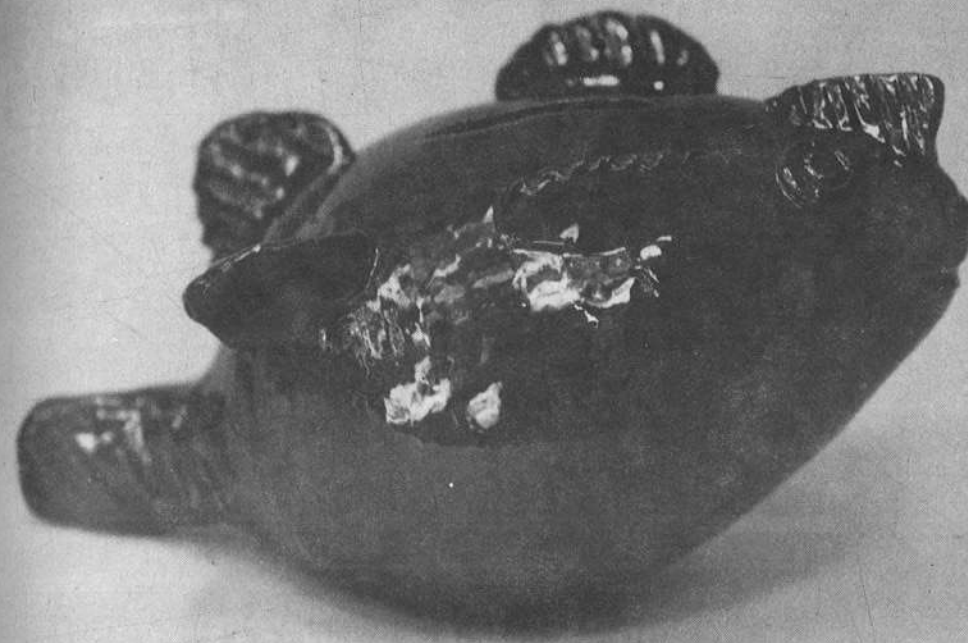
If it is fix in that the popular arts are expressions of plastic character endowed with esthetic attributes, which roots are depth in the



Bird. Glazed small whistle. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

in the past and which life explain it the function they perform in the breast from specific community, the work of Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez can frame within this branch human activity. Especially on the other hand the popular art is a handmade profession, personal and household, learning in house under the guide and example of the elderly.

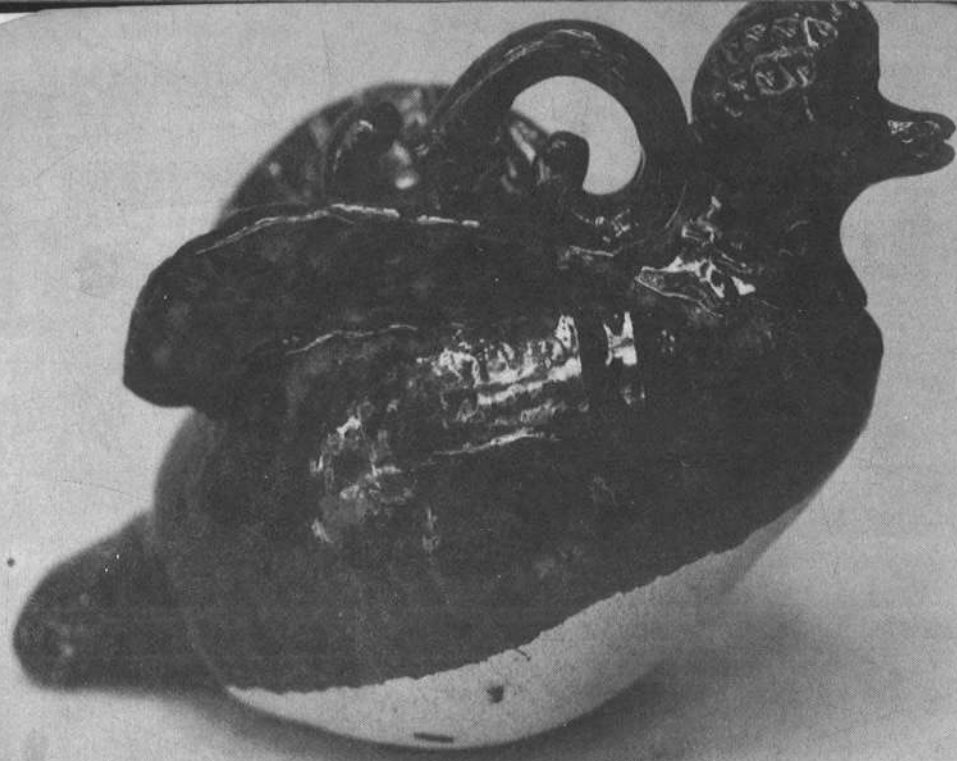
The whistle and giant piggy banks elaboration recreated by Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez, constituted a lucky creator profession that show the identity of human conglomerate and for them; this goes beyond the mere conservation directly transmitted notions it involves a way of conceiving the world and life itself.



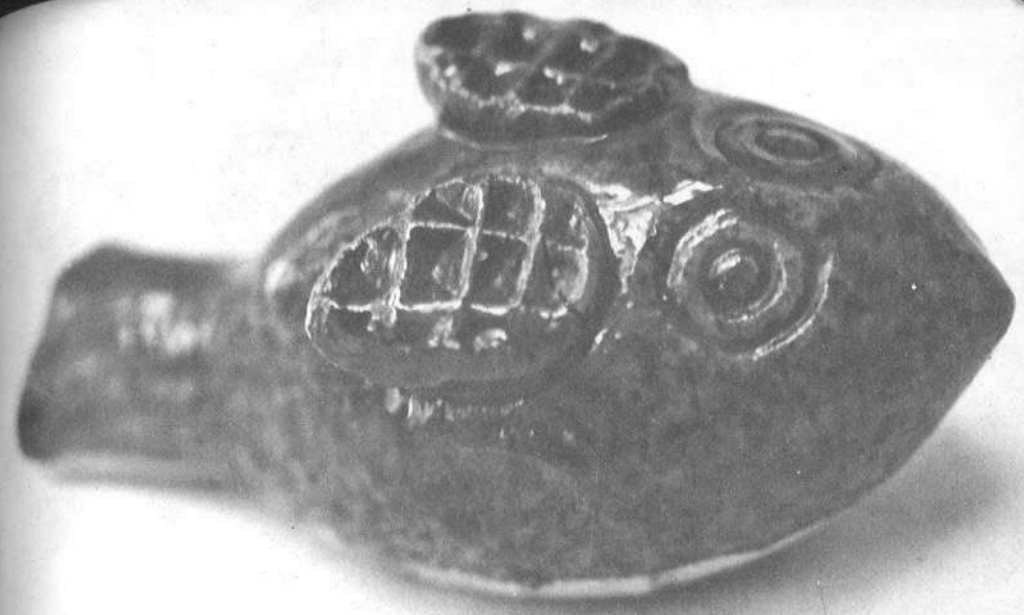
Fish. Giant glazed piggy bank. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

When Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez is interviewed about exists of a handicraft center sponsored for Estate in Totonicapán, he answers that "... these are government employers. Best jobs." is defending, like says Gramsci,⁵ a world conception not only unelaborate, unofficial and systematic, but a super structure that reflects the mood to be of his

5. Antonio Gramsci, *Antología* (selección y notas de Manuel Sacristán), México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1970, p. 491.



Bird. Giant glazed whistle, (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

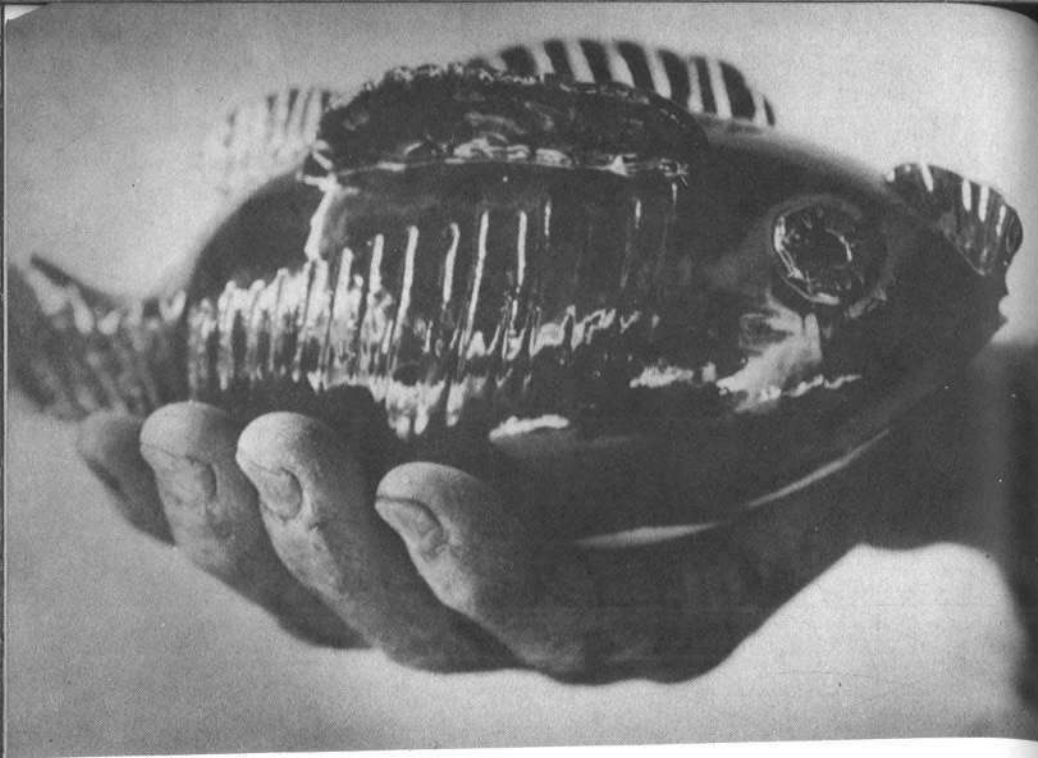


Fish. Small glazed whistle (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

own town. After all, in rigorous scientific terms, the popular art o folkloric art is a cultural resistance modality, is an expression of social struggle.

But it occurs in this case, as in other equally representative of folkloric culture, that the popular knowledge, reiterated through practice, it also fed of incessant inventiveness, as well as it keeps its attachment and fidelity to oral tradition.

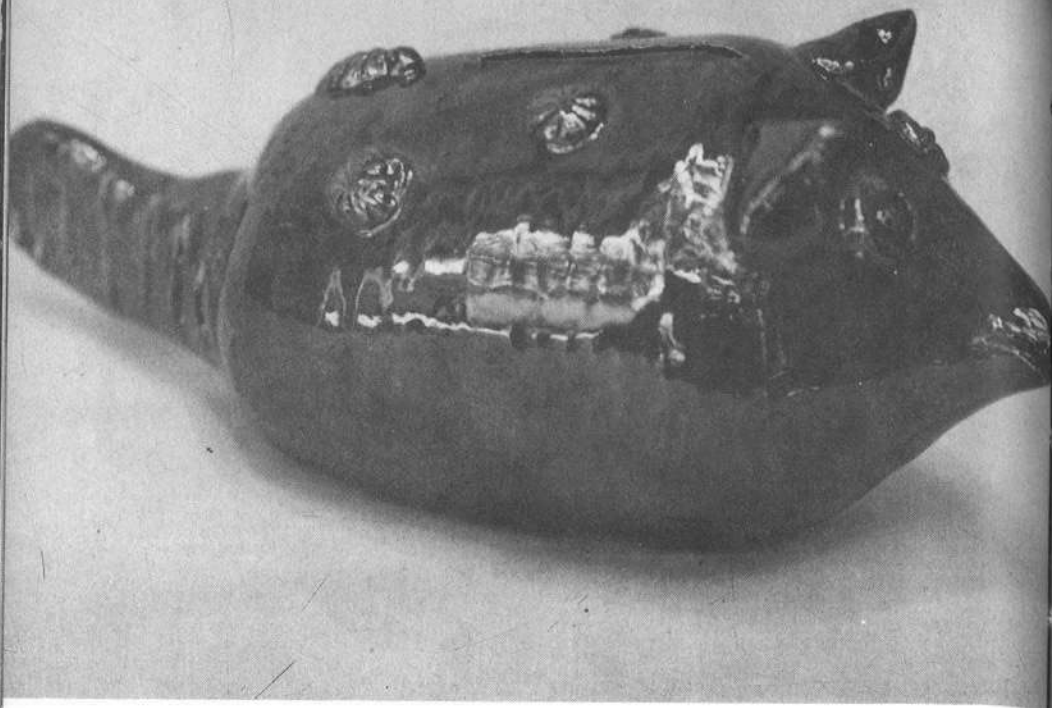
In the beautiful whistles of Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez survives the ancient idea of prehispanic whistle. The technic steps of glazed ceramic arrived at the conquest have been able to introduce precisely technique nature modifications .



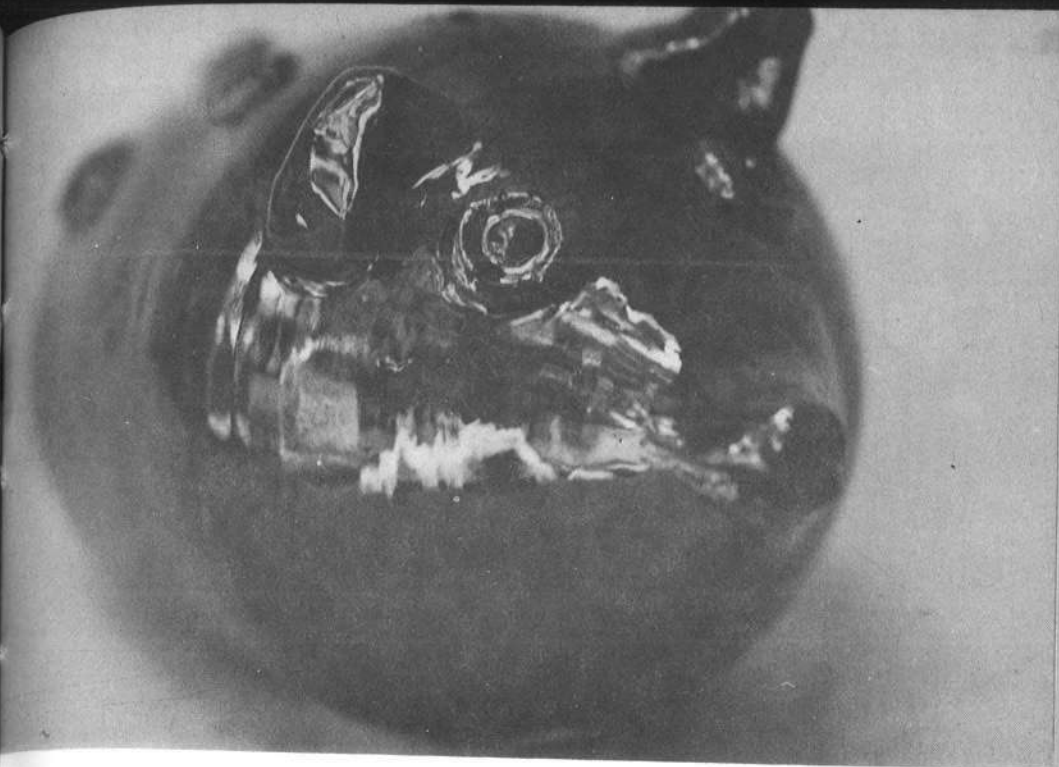
Piggy banks that that barely fit in the whole extension of one hand.
(Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



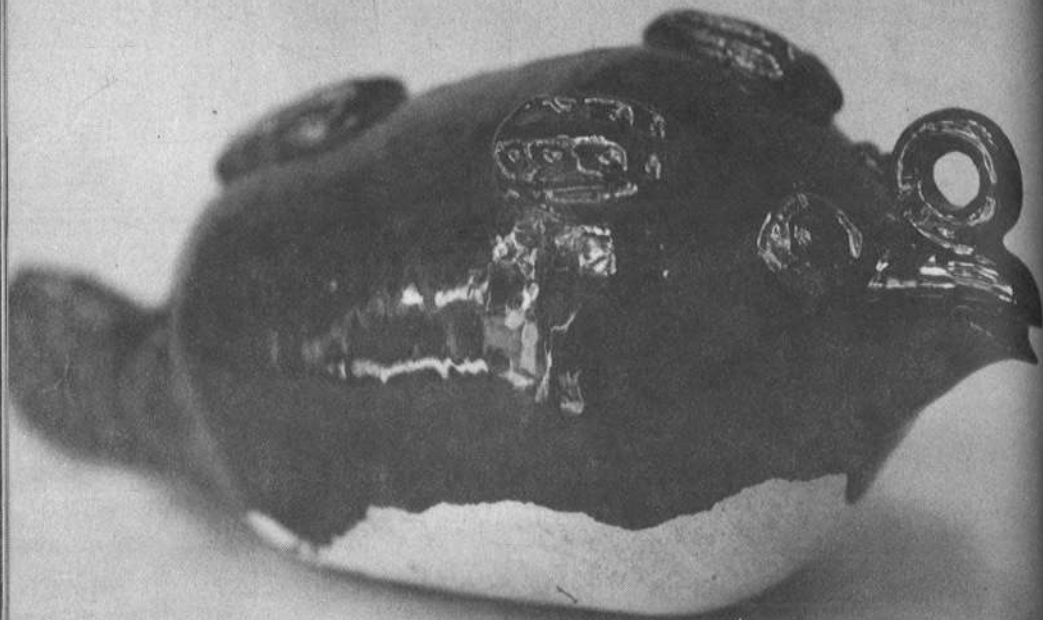
Bird. Big glazed whistle. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



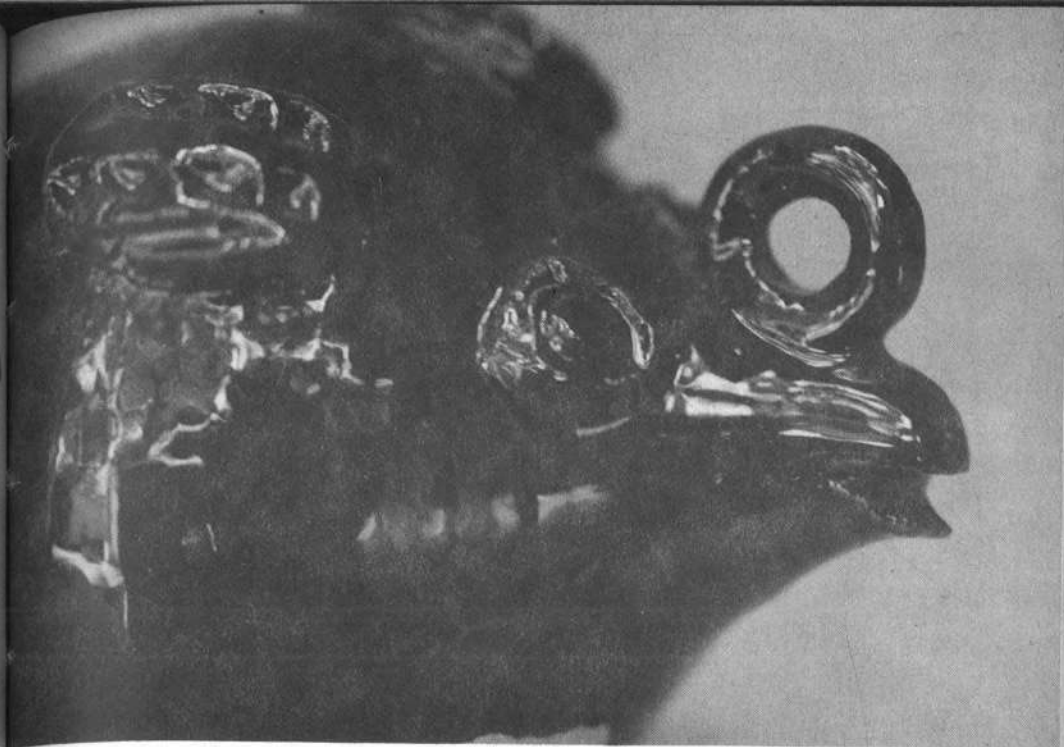
Fish. Glazed piggy bank. (Phototograph: Mauro Calanchina).



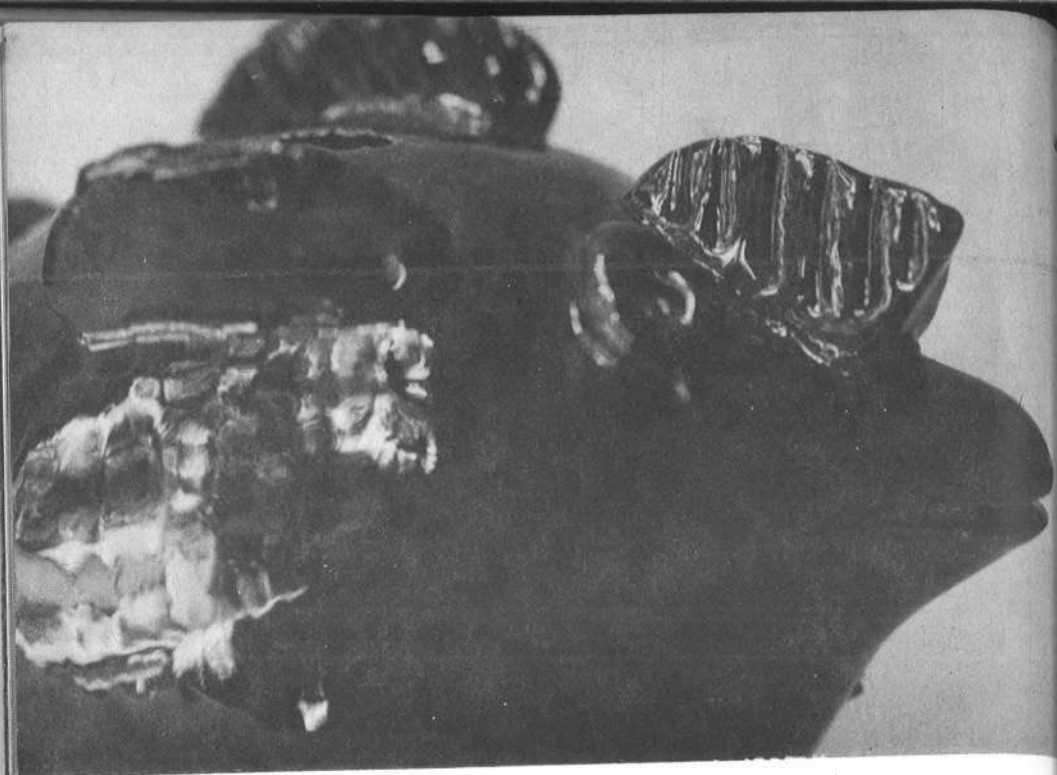
Fishes with ears and dog or mountain pig faces... (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Fish. Glazed piggy bank. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Fish. Giant glazed piggy bank. Detail. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).



Fish. Giant glazed piggy bank. Detail. (Photograph: Mauro Calanchina).

These Totoncapán whistles have been zoomorphic and its physiognomy surprise so much as the its ancestors: fishes with ears and dog or mountain pig faces and really fantasy birds.

Whitin of formal canons established for the tradition are manifested in this ceramic few variants incorporated for the creative genius of the imaginative and skilled artist who is Pablo Francisco Gutiérrez. With unobjectionable authenticity the collective memory filters through of this exceptional man.

Guatemala, April 1975.