

# Shelk'nam body paintings: ancient and recent uses of an ephemeral art form in Tierra del Fuego (southern end of Southamerica)

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a study of the traditional creation and use of body painting by the Shelk'nam, a hunter-gatherer society from Tierra del Fuego. We present the methods used to carry out a systematic research on 43 historical-ethnographic texts and 130 visual sources (33 drawings and 97 photographs) which record information about such artistic productions from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The research is completed with a study of the current uses of images of painted Shelk'nam persons and/or their body painting designs, on different material culture media: crafts, fine arts, street art, jewellery, stickers, etc. The forms in which the visual corpus of traditional body paintings has been selected, reproduced and manipulated creatively to produce new images with new uses are discussed.

It is suggested that: a) the uses of this body ornamentation technique were related to its versatile and ephemeral features, which facilitated the creation of different roles in different use contexts of Shelk'nam social life; b) the current reproduction of images of Shelk'nam painted persons has been oriented towards the representation of *hain* spirits (traditionally embodied during a male initiation ceremony) due to their appearance, which is esthetically original and visually "exotic" for current Western observers. Thus, the comparison developed here if followed by a reflection on the influence that production and use contexts had over the artistic images and their plastic, aesthetic, technical and funcional qualities, both in the past and the present, in the Southernmost end of Southamerica.

**Keywords:** traditional body art - material culture - visual archaeology - Tierra del Fuego - production - uses - fine art - street art – souvenirs

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## **Introduction. Shelk'nam body art: traditional creations and current re-creations.**

### *Aims and structure of this paper*

This paper has a twofold aim: on one hand, it will present an analysis of the creation and use of traditional body paintings by the Shelk'nam, an Indigenous hunter-gatherer society from Tierra del Fuego; on the other hand, it will develop a study about the current uses of images of painted Shelk'nam persons and/or their body painting designs, produced in different media: crafts, fine arts, urban art, jewellery pieces, stickers/patches, etc. (see details below). This twofold aim converges in a broader topic, centred on the research about the influence that contexts of production and use of art images have had in the past and have in the present, over the plastic, aesthetic, technical and functional qualities of such images. To this end, once the analysis of the traditional productions and uses of body paintings has been developed, we will assess the ways in which such traditional visual corpus has been creatively selected, reproduced and manipulated in order to produce new images with new uses.

Firstly, the historical-ethnographic written and visual sources that contain relevant information about this topic are presented, as well as the methodological procedures used in their analysis. Secondly, a systematic synthesis of the information about the creation and use of body paintings by the Shelk'nam is presented according to the following topics: a) when were the paintings worn; b) who wore them (age and gender); c) which body portions were painted; d) body painting designs; e) materials and techniques used in the application of paint; f) other body ornaments worn by the Shelk'nam; g) object decoration -masks- and their combined use with body painting.

The body painting production and use contexts are then analysed, emphasizing the public or private/secret character of the paintings production, and pointing out the effect that such production contexts had over the use (displaying and viewing) of these paintings.

The rationale behind this analysis is that body art is an active form of material culture which can have clear effects on the social roles and relationships of the people who wear it and view it (e.g. Gell 1998). Following this conceptual perspective, some of the factors relative to the creation of body paintings and to the transmission processes of the visual

traditions linked to these creations are discussed. The creation and election of this body ornamentation technology is assessed in terms of its ductility and ephemeral character, which, it will be argued, facilitated the creation and the transformation of diverse images in different use contexts.

The following section of the paper presents an analysis of material culture objects currently produced in Chile and Argentina, which bear images of painted Shelk'nam persons and/or their body painting designs, with the aims of: a) identifying the selection of referents within the corpus of traditional images, and b) characterising the reproductions, free adaptations and creations of new images.

Finally, a comparative assessment of the production and uses of the images under study is presented in the conclusions section. Such analysis focuses on the visual transmutations, the changes in the techniques used to create them, the new media on which the images are displayed (other than the body), and the practical, economic and social functions of these material culture items.

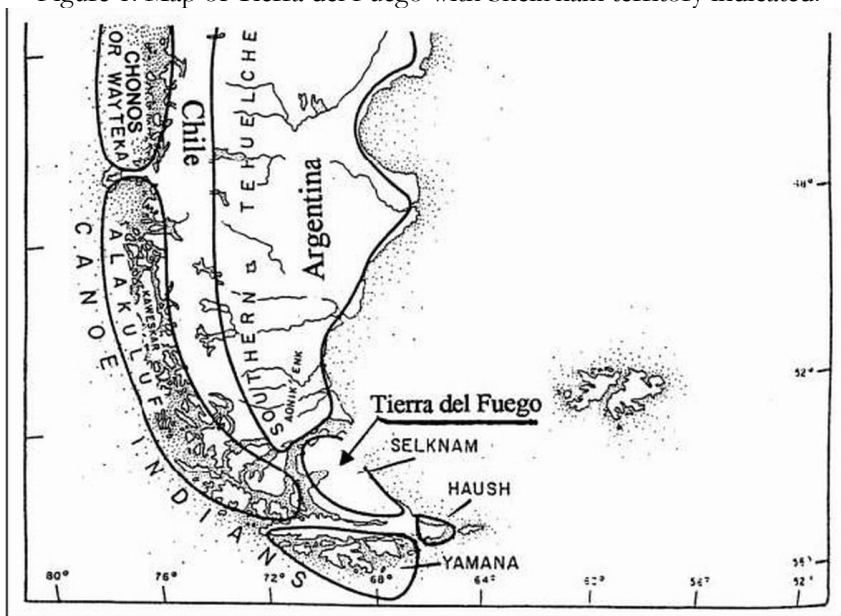
## **State of the art and background information**

The Shelk'nam were a hunter-gatherer Indigenous society of Tierra del Fuego, whose territory occupied the northern and central portion of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego (figure 1). Their subsistence was based on hunting guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*), rodents, birds, etc. and on gathering plants and eggs ((Borrero 1991; Bridges 1951; Chapman 1982, 1997; Darwin 1839; De Agostini 1924; Gusinde 1982[1931]; etc.). Their mobility was nomadic and exclusively pedestrian. They inhabited huts built with branches and animal hides, and had developed a highly effective hunting technology, based on the use of bows and arrows. Their cosmology included a very rich series of myths, of which the most important were expressed and transmitted during the male initiation ceremony called *hain* (see below). In this and several other occasions of their social life, the Shelk'nam wore body paintings.

From the 16<sup>th</sup>. century onwards, numerous contact processes with Western groups affected the physical and sociocultural integrity of the Shelk'nam, including violent attacks to their population, the reduction of their territories through the establishment of ranches (estancias), their intentional transculturation through religious Salesian Catholic missions, etc. (Borrero 1957; Borrero 1991; Manzi 2010; Nicoletti 2008; etc.). These

processes led to the destructuring of their hunter-gatherer mode of life. Currently, Shelk'nam descendants are organised in the *Comunidad Selk'nam – Ona "Rafaela Ishton"* based in Río Grande, Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego (Argentina).

Figure 1. Map of Tierra del Fuego with Shelk'nam territory indicated.



Source: Orquera 1987, modified.

The first known paper that includes some analyses of Shelk'nam body painting deals with this topic with the aim of using historical information to generate hypotheses about the activities that could later be evidenced in the archaeological record (Manzi 1991: 140, 142). Such paper constitutes an interesting contribution to Fueguian archaeology, but is not centred in the analysis of the contexts of production and use of body painting, which are the core topic of this paper.

The current paper stems from results developed in our PhD thesis, which focused on the analysis of the production and uses of body paintings by the Shelk'nam and Yamana Indigenous societies of Tierra del Fuego (Fiore 2002). Such thesis, as well as later publications, analysed some of the socioeconomic, technical and visual-cognitive aspects implied

in the creation and display of these paintings, both at an intra-society level, as well as at an inter-society -comparative- level (Fiore 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2008).

This text takes up on that research and elaborates on the results about the traditional uses of body painting, and then compares such information with new data relative to the current uses of such images.

### **Body art as a social product: theoretical elements to approach its analysis**

*Body painting* can be defined in a broad manner as the application of paint to the human body. Such application can have different uses, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and comprise utilitarian functions, social functions, symbolic functions, aesthetic functions, etc. (see details below).

*Paint* is produced through the use of pigments, which act as colouring substances, combined with a *binder*, either aqueous or greasy, which gives cohesion to the paint mixture and helps it bind to the medium where it is applied. In *body painting* practices, the human body, skin and hair are the media on which paint is applied<sup>1</sup> (Fiore 2002: 29). The application of paint on the body can be carried out through several techniques, including the use of hands or fingers –used as tools– as well as the use of specific painting tools (see data and analysis below).

In this paper the notion of *body art* is defined as a creation to decorate or ornament the human body. Body art can be more or less permanent according to the technique with which it has been produced: for example, tattooing (the application of ink under the skin; e.g. Kaepler 1988) and scarifications (the intentional formation of scars through cuts and/or insertions of small inorganic grains of materials under the skin; e.g. Vogel 1988) are comparatively much more permanent than body painting. In turn, body painting is one of the most *ephemeral art forms* currently known. In spite of these differences in the relative duration of body art, all these forms of body ornamentation have very low chances of conservation in the archaeological record, that is, they have very low “archaeological visibility”: for this reason, body art is mainly analysed from anthropological and sociological approaches, although approaches from the archaeology of art do also exist (with less frequency). Excavations of archaeological sites have recovered pigment residues and painting tools, which, in spite of the fact of not yielding information about the morphology of the designs, do

provide evidence about the colours and techniques of paint production and application probably used in the past. However, pigment residues may also correspond to other material culture practices such as object decoration or hide preparation, so the problem of equifinality also lowers the chances of identifying body painting practices in some archaeological contexts. Given such low archaeological visibility of body painting practices, the main data sources used in this paper are historical-ethnographic texts which provide data about different uses, meanings and forms of creation of these paintings, as well as drawings and photographs which document designs and display contexts (see details in the following section). By combining these different data sources, we will pursue here a *visual archaeology* of Shelk'nam body painting (for a discussion about visual archaeology see Fiore 2007a, Fiore and Varela 2009).

The study of these sources of data –texts, photos, archaeological materials– can be approached from different theoretical perspectives, which guide research questions and provide relevant concepts to develop data analysis and interpret the results. In the case under study, we will focus on the theoretical conception of *art as a social product*. This perspective has been developed and applied in the anthropology of art (e.g. Forge 1973; García Canclini 1986, Layton 1991, Morphy 1994, Mendez 1995, Gell 1998, etc.), sociology of art (e.g. Wolf 1993, Tanner 1993, etc.), art history (e.g. Fernie 1995, Bryson et al. 1996, Nelson y Schiff 1996 etc.) and archaeology of art (e.g. Leroi-Gourhan 1976; Aschero 1988; Conkey et al. 1997 etc.)<sup>2</sup>. It proposes that art is a material product and, as such, is inextricably linked to its socioeconomic contexts of production and use. Therefore, this theoretical framework aims to analyse not only the artwork/image/object in itself, but also these contexts, thus generating a greater knowledge of its visual features and social, symbolic, aesthetic, ideological and political functions (idem). In the cases studied in this text, the analysis of the *use contexts* of body painting can account for many of its functions –which are not necessarily mutually exclusive– such as: body ornamentation according to aesthetic qualities and norms; the visual marking/creation of social roles; the communication of information about individual identities, social statuses, or group identities; and utilitarian functions such as camouflage of the painted person with the surrounding landscape (idem).

From this theoretical perspective, the analysis of body art should not be restricted to the study of the aesthetic/ornamental and symbolic

functions of the designs painted on the body, since these do not cover the total number of social implications that the paintings may have had. This entails that ornaments may have fulfilled other functions within the society which produced and consumed them, and such functions go beyond conveying *aesthetic qualities* to their wearers or *passively communicating* symbolic contents of mythical-religious or social nature. Body art can also fulfill clearly active functions which go beyond the visual representation of a previously existent content, to *actively build* a new role or status throughout the social life of a person –e.g. from girl to woman, from non-initiated to initiated, from non-shaman to shaman, etc.– (Fiore 2002, 2007). In turn, these multiple functions may have happened in public or private use contexts, and in quotidian or ceremonial situations. Such functions and use contexts have been searched for and identified in the Shelk'nam case study (see data and analysis below).

Regarding the body painting *production contexts*, the conception of art as a social product implies that art is, precisely, the result of a production process, that is, a work process which is developed by one or several persons through a series of stages: raw material procurement (pigments, binders, tool materials); paint preparation and tool manufacture; paint application through one or several techniques to create one or several designs; retouch of the design (a possible stage which does not always occur); erasing the design (*idem*); and storage of pigments, of prepared paint and/or of painting tools for future use (*idem*; Manzi 1991; Fiore 2002, 2005). The study of such production process needs to be analysed in relation to its context, by assessing who produced the paint, who managed paint application techniques, who knew how to make and interpret the designs, who transmitted the technical, plastic/visual and symbolic information to continue (or transform) the body painting tradition in this society, and in which contexts –public or private, groupal or individual, quotidian or ceremonial– were these paintings produced (Fiore 2002, 2005).

Thus, the consideration of body painting as a social product necessarily entails not only the analysis of its visual qualities, but also the characterisation of its materiality as an object (Fiore 2011). In this sense, it is interesting to note that body painting is an ephemeral product: this very feature that makes it a non-durable material –which generates a disadvantage from the point of view of those who study it–, offers a potential advantage for its wearers, insofar as it provides a great versatility

for the creation of different designs which, successively, can be painted over the same body. In this way, a single person, in a specific moment of his/her social life, can display a design that represents a specific role, and in another moment he/she can display another design which communicates information about another social status (different to the previous one), and yet in another moment he/she can display on his/her body another design, just for aesthetic purposes. Such technical versatility allows for a great practical ductility in the social use of body painting, which is rooted in its very production process.

As a consequence, from this theoretical viewpoint, it is essential to *link* the *production context* with the *use context* (i.e wearing and viewing) not only in the study of traditional body paintings in the past, but also in the study of the current uses of images of painted persons displayed on material culture items in the present. The form in which the productive work process has been carried out –who, where, when, how– is directly linked to the future uses of such art –what for, by whom, where, when–. It will be argued in this paper that in order to make certain traditional Shelk’nam body art displays more effective, in some ceremonial situations the paintings were produced in private contexts and later shown to persons who were unaware of such production process; while in the case of paintings displayed in public situations, these could be produced in public and quotidian contexts, since this would not affect the effects of their later displays (see cases below).

Contrary to the Shelk’nam body painting production and use contexts, which happened in an Indigenous hunter-gatherer society, the production and use contexts of material culture objects which represent images of painted Shelk’nam persons and/or body painting designs, happens within contemporary Western societies, with capitalist economies in countries located in the southern end of Southamerica –Chile and Argentina–. So the material culture objects under study in this paper need to be analysed within such context. Such materials can be grouped in the following categories:

a) Handicrafts: objects of craftsmanship (manual) production, of variable sizes but transportable, and generated through the use of different techniques, using materials such as wood, ceramic, hide, etc. These objects are produced with different purposes, including their sale to tourists as “souvenirs”, and, in occasions, to collectors.



b) Fine arts: images generated on canvasses (generally of rectangular shape and where a flat surface predominates, giving an overall bidimensional feel to the artwork), or installations (predominantly threedimensional); these are made using one or several mixed techniques (oil, acrylic, watercolour, collage, intervened photographs, photograph projections in slide or digital format, etc.). Fine art pieces are generally produced for their exhibition in galleries or museums, and for sale to collectors and occasionally to museums. Their reproduction in postcards and posters facilitates their massive consumption.

c) Urban art: this category includes diverse forms of plastic interventions in the urban public space, including those known as graffitis, street art, handcrafted advertisement images, etc.; these images are produced by various techniques –direct painting, stencilling, chalking, gluing previously painted papers, etc.– and they are fixed on walls, doors, roofs or floors of buildings and streets. These images generally do not have commercial functions but mainly have expressive functions of individual and group contents, of aesthetic, social, ideological and political nature. However, some of them –like the handcrafted advertisement images– do have the intention of calling the public’s eye as a potential consumer of a publisized product or place. Due to their nature, fixed to walls of the urban space, which does not allow for their transportation, their reproduction in the form of postcards and posters allows for their massive sale and thus generates a new form of consumption of these images.

d) Jewellery pieces: these are ornaments produced by handcraft or industrial work using different materials (metal, wood, etc.); they are produced for sale and are worn as personal ornaments (pins, pendants, earrings, etc.)

e) Stickers and patches: this category groups small shallow objects made on sticky paper, plastic or fabric, which are generally of quadrangular or circular shape, and are illustrated with printed (stickers) or stitched (patches) images, to be glued or sewn to different media, such as notebooks, folders or clothing items. They are produced in an industrial manner for their massive sale, and, in the case under study, are generally produced as tourist souvenirs.

f) Postcards: some early photographs of Fueguian Indigenous groups, including portraits of Shelk’nam persons wearing body painting have been reproduced in the form of postcards; the selection and circulation of these images is a topic in its own right, and will not be

covered in this paper. However, postcards of fine art pieces that represent painted persons and/or body painting designs –that is, copies of items belonging to category “b”–, are included in this paper since they offer access to the above mentioned artworks, which otherwise would not have been accessible for our study.

### **Materials and methods: data sources and their systematic treatment**

Research on Shelk’nam traditional body paintings has been carried out through the analysis of two main sources of evidence: 43 texts written by 30 first-hand observers –voyagers, missionaries, ethnographers, etc.– from the 16<sup>th</sup>. to the 20<sup>th</sup>. centuries, and 130 visual records (97 photographs taken and/or published by 9 photographers, and 33 drawings) which document a total of 235 painted Shelk’nam individuals.

In order to assess the relevance, reliability and precision of the written data, the texts were analysed considering a series of variables: a) the period along which the author stayed in Tierra del Fuego; b) the language in which he/she communicated with the Shelk’nam; c) the number of observations he/she made; d) the author's biases –aims, concepts, values, etc.–. Later, the similarities and differences between texts written by a single author, and between texts written by different authors were assessed in order to monitor their contents and appraise their accuracy.

Photographs were analysed as sources of visual data, which, when studied in large samples, evidence both the elections and biases of the photographers and some of the material culture patterns of the photographed subjects (Fiore 2007a; Fiore and Varela 2009).

In order to assess the reliability of the visual contents of these photographs, the formation processes of the photographic record were analysed. These include: a) the type of photo shoot (type of photographic plane; spontaneous or posed situations, etc.); b) the developing process; c) the copying process; d) the copy editions; e) the publication/exhibition of copies; f) the archive and/or discard of negatives and positive copies (*idem*). The comparative analysis of written and visual records helped to confront data from independent sources to assess whether these contradicted, completed or corroborated each other, thus generating more reliable results.

Research on the current uses of Shelk’nam body painting images in contemporary material culture media has been carried out through

observations and photographic surveys done from 2003 to 2013 in the cities of Ushuaia (Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, Argentina), Puerto Williams (Navarino Island, Chile) and Punta Arenas (southern continental Patagonia, Chile). These surveys aimed to record all types of contemporary images and material culture objects which represented/reproduced Fuegian Indigenous material culture and/or images of Fuegian persons found in public spaces and in two art studios (of artists Renata Rafalak and Mónica Alvarado, both in Ushuaia<sup>3</sup>). The surveys were completed with observations and records in art museums (MALBA) and art galleries (ArteBA) in Buenos Aires (Argentina). These records generated a great corpus of images, of which we have selected those which are relevant for this paper topic.

### **Shelk'nam body painting: an overview of their traditional art**

This section presents a synthesis of the data relative to Shelk'nam body painting with the aim of generating a factual panorama from which to infer and analyse the production contexts and traditional uses of this form of ephemeral art in this Fuegian Indigenous society.

#### *Production processes: painting materials and techniques*

The information about the materials and techniques used by the Shelk'nam to paint comes from several sources (Sarmiento de Gamboa [1579] 1950; Spegazzini 1882; Lista 1887; Segers 1891; Gallardo 1910; Dabbene 1904, 1911; Borgatello 1929; De Agostini 1924; L. Bridges 1951; Gusinde 1982[1931]; Lothrop 1928). These sources provide data about: a) the procurement, use and storage of raw materials, b) the preparation and conservation of paint, c) the application techniques, d) the production contexts of the designs via the application of paint. For reasons of space, the total dataset and quotations about each topic cannot be given here; these will be presented synthetically (see details in Fiore 2002: 172-234; 724-729).

The following steps have been identified in the Shelk'nam body painting production sequences: 1) raw material procurement; 2) raw material storage (optional); 3) paint preparation; 4) paint storage (optional); 5) painting tools preparation (optional according to whether these were used in paint application, see below); 6) paint application on the body; 7)

maintenance –retouch– of the designs (optional); 8) design erasing (optional) (Fiore 2002).

The main *colours* used by the Shelk'nam to produce their body paintings were red, white and black. This coincides with the range of colours used by their Yamana neighbours to create their own body paintings (see for example Lothrop 1928, Gusinde 1986[1937]; Fiore 2002). This can be partly explained by the natural availability of raw materials with which these paintings were produced, and with the similarity in the technical processes through which these were transformed with paint (see next section).

Written records are very consistent regarding the documentation of the use of these colours, which were mentioned by most of the authors. *Red* was documented by 18 authors<sup>4</sup>; *white* was documented by 17 authors<sup>5</sup>; *black* was documented by 16 authors<sup>6</sup>. Yellow was also mentioned, but with less detail and only by six authors<sup>7</sup>.

Raw materials to produce red paint include sediments/earth, clay, ochre and blood; white paint was produced using white ashes, gypsum and lime; charcoal was used to produce black paint (Segers 1891, Dabbene 1911, De Agostini 1924, Lothrop 1928, Borgatello 1929, L. Bridges 1951, Gusinde 1982[1931]). The binder used to give cohesion and adhesion to the paint could be saliva, water, grease or oil (ibid).

Paint preparation included technical procedures such as scraping the colouring substance (from a larger lump of such substance), crushing/grinding it with the hands or chewing it, and, sometimes, its thermal alteration with fire. The colouring substance was later hydrated with the above mentioned binders, and then applied to the body.

Six *body painting application techniques* have been identified: 1) rubbing paint with the hand on the skin; 2) spitting paint on the skin and then rubbing it; 3) finger application; 4) application with a cylindrical or flat rod or with a dolphin mandible (mentioned as “porpoise” in L. Bridges 951); 5) spreading paint on hand palm, scraping fine negative lines from the painted surface, and applying the remaining positive lines by pressure of the hand palm on top of the body; 6) rubbing paint on the skin with the hand and then eliminating fine lines by scraping them with the fingers, leaving an impression of negative skin lines on and positive painted lines on the skin. A seventh technique, which does not strictly correspond to the category of body paint but rather to the broader category of body ornamentation, is that of sticking small feather balls on the skin, which has been previously

painted/oiled. This technique was used in very few and specific occasions by some men during the *hain* initiation ceremony –see below– (Fiore 2002, 2005). When the colouring substance or paint was not immediately used, it was sometimes stored in a leather or gut bag.

The *paint production contexts* are not very well documented in the written sources, but it is evident that both men and women knew how to produce paint and also stored it (Fiore 2002). In turn, the *design production contexts*, were varied and are documented with different degrees of detail. There are comparatively very few data regarding the paintings which were used in *everyday situations*: written and visual records backup the inference that these were produced in domestic spaces (huts) and in open air spaces, which entails that these contexts were both groupal and individual, and that they were public, neither sacred nor secret. Regarding the paintings used for *special situations* of Shelk'nam social life (see details below), again, data are not abundant, but it is clear that the production context was not quotidian: it was private and individual or it operated in small groups - such is the case of the paintings for the first menstruation (see below). Contrary to this, in the case of the spirit painting for the initiation ceremony called *hain*, the production context was not only private but also secret (see below). The reasons that led to generating such different production contexts are directly linked to the different uses that the designs would have later when displayed. These are treated in the following sections.

#### *Who were painted: gender and age*

Persons of male and female gender wore body paintings. In the written records, painted men are much more frequently mentioned than women. This can be due to two factors: a) that women got painted less frequently than men, b) that women were seen and recorded less frequently by voyagers, missionaries and ethnographers due to some Shelk'nam attitude respect of foreigners, which could have included a contact strategy with these Westerners dominated or controlled by men. This latter option could be understood as part of the general reaction of the Shelk'nam towards foreigners, since for several centuries they avoided contact with Western persons (ver Cooper 1917, Gusinde 1982[1931], Borrero 1991).

In spite of the fact that most recent written records and photographs clearly show that women and men wore body paintings, this does not entail that there were no gender differences in the use of these

paintings. The most clear difference is that relative to the embodiment of spirits in the *bain* male initiation ceremony. This role was always and exclusively represented by painted and masked men.

The age of Shelk'nam individuals who wore paintings is not clearly mentioned in most of the written sources. In most cases, they refer to painted "men" or "women" without giving details about their age. Only in few cases are elderly people, youngsters, children and babies mentioned. In turn, visual records show painted persons of all age groups –elderly, adults, youngsters, children and babies–, although elderly people, children and babies are less frequent (Fiore 2002; Fiore and Varela 2009).

### *Painted body portions*

The Shelk'nam painted their faces, trunk (chest, back, abdomen, hips, buttocks and genitals), arms and legs. Most of the early texts do not specify whether they wore body paintings, and mostly refer to facial paintings (e.g. Van Noort 1599 en Gusinde 1982[1931]; Nodal 1621; Labbe 1711; Banks 1768; FitzRoy 1839; Darwin 1845). However, the use of paint over the body is recorded in comparatively more recent texts (e.g. Lista 1887; Segers 1891; Payró 1898; Gallardo 1910; Dabbene 1904, 1911; Cojazzi 1914, etc.).

Visual records show Shelk'nam persons wearing facial paintings (on the face or on masks covering the head), as well as facial *and* body paintings (in the strict sense, that is, over the trunk, arms and legs. These latter were mainly used during the *bain* (see below). This ceremony was kept secret by the Shelk'nam respect of the Western observers: for this reason only very few of them could observe and record it, when the degree of contact of this society with foreigners was much deeper and unavoidable. Therefore, it is possible that for this reason the use of paint over the whole body, as well as painted masks, appears recorded in comparatively few records (though some of them are extremely thorough).

### *Painted designs and use contexts*

The designs applied by the Shelk'nam to their bodies were generally simple, but visually varied. Three different analytical levels can be used to study these body paintings: the *design* –the entire body painting worn by an individual–, the *motif/s* that compose the design, and the *basic elements* used in the construction of each motif. Thirteen elements have been identified in Shelk'nam body painting motif construction: bands,

dashes, dots, big dots, lines, irregular lines, rows of dots, rows of dots attached/superimposed to lines, patches (irregular stains of paint, usually of sub-rectangular shape), rows of big dots, rows of parallel dashes, paint backgrounds (large portions of skin covered by a single colour of paint, which can be part of a design or the basis on which other motif is then painted), and small feather balls attached to the painted body.

The use of one or several of these 13 elements combined, generated a great number of possible motifs. A systematic analysis of the visual records (drawings and photographs, particularly) has rendered the identification of 49 Shelk'nam motif types; of course there may have been other motif types created by this society, but these are the ones recorded in the studied visual sources. In turn, body painting designs could be created by using one motif only, or through the combination of various motifs.

The Shelk'nam wore body paintings during everyday life situations and special occasions that happened along their social lives. Everyday life situations are defined as quotidian situations (for example, hunting, paying visits, etc.). Special occasions are defined as those relative to a specific moment of the social life of an individual or group, which marks a transition in the existence of the person/s insofar as he/she/they live a change in their roles or relationships with other person/s (e.g. marriage, initiation to adulthood, mourning, etc.).

In spite of the fact that everyday life situations are more frequent than special occasions, contrary to what could be expected, the former situations are the least documented, both in terms of the low number of observers that recorded them, and in terms of the lack of detail provided by such records.

The use of body paintings in *everyday life situations* include the following:

- *Mood expressions*, a situation recorded by six authors (Lista 1887: 101; Gallardo 1910:152; Borgatello 1929: 182; De Agostini 1924: 276, 1941: 68; L. Bridges 1951: 367; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 207). We have recorded only one visual record of facial painting worn for such situation: this photograph shows a girl wearing a design composed by a series of dark lines<sup>8</sup> radially laid out from the lower eyelids downwards, along the cheeks (see figure 2). According to Bridges, who observed this facial painting and took the photograph, these “*lines of yellow clay*” were displayed by the girl “*to show that she feels moody and does not wish to be bothered*” (Bridges 1951: caption of plate XXXIX).

Figure 2. Facial painting worn to express mood.



*Source:* Photo taken by L. Bridges in the 1910's (approx.); copy held in Archivo Fotográfico de Imágenes Etnográficas de Fuego-Patagonia located in the Asociación de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Buenos Aires, Argentina (ARC-FOT-AIA). The detail of this photograph (right) has been digitally retouched to enhance the painted design.

- *Personal ornament*, a situation recorded in texts written by three direct observers (Gallardo 1910: 152; Borgatello 1929: 182; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 209), but not recorded in photos or drawings. It entails that the design was applied only for ornamental purposes, but with no other social/symbolic functions.
- *Paying visits*, a situation mentioned by two observers (Gallardo 1910: 151; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 208), but with no visual records, in which the person paying a visit got painted, particularly on the face.
- *Travelling*, a situation also described by two observers (Beauvoir 1915: 206; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 208), but again with no visual records.
- *Hunting*, this includes the "camouflage" functions of body painting, work to blend the figure of the hunter with the landscape, documented by three authors in written sources but not in drawings or photographs (Segers 1891: 69; L. Bridges 1951: 367; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 208). According to Bridges, the Shelk'nam wore yellow paint to camouflage with dry pastures, and white to camouflage with snow (L. Bridges 1951: 367). We have also recorded the use of a facial painting documented in photographs taken to men posing with their bows and arrows, as if ready to shoot an arrow (figure 3). This design consists of a motif (motif type "E" in our classification), composed by two straight horizontal lines, each one placed in the centre of each cheek; on top of each line, a middle-size dot is laid out. Our research on visual records (photos and drawings) indicates that this very same design used in hunting situations was also used in other situations, including: a) *wrestling* -by youngsters/adults- (see details below); b) *playing games* -e.g. children using slings- (figure 3); c) *unidentified situations* -where people, of different ages, are photographed only



posing for the camera and not carrying out a specific activity- (figure 3). Thus, motif type "E" is one of the most characteristic ones in the Shelk'nam repertoire, since it was created and used by persons of this society in different situations, and, given that these visual records have been checked and are reliable, it can be suggested that this motif type can be used as a visual diacritical mark to identify the painted person as Shelk'nam and/or as wearing a Shelk'nam facial design.

- *Combat, wrestling, fights and "war"*: it is very difficult to distinguish in the early texts between the quotations regarding an activity such as "war" or combat (which imply the violent attack of one group to another, or an aggressive encounter between them), and the more sport-like activity such as one-to-one wrestling, which has been documented with more detail by more recent observers. For this reason, all quotations regarding activities of this nature have been included in the same category; such written records were produced by 10 authors (Lista 1887: 101; Segers 1891: 61; Payro 1898: 210; Beauvoir 1915: 206; Gallardo 1910: 151; Dabbene 1911: 263; Borgatello 1929: 182; De Agostini 1924: 272; L. Bridges 1951: 272, 318; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 209, 1101-1102). According to these texts, wrestling painting involved covering the whole body with white pigment; in figure 3, such cover is not entirely visible, although the above mentioned motif type "E" is quite notorious.

Figure 3. Photos of Shelk'nam persons wearing the same facial painting motif (type "E") in different situations.



Source: Photos by M. Gusinde, taken between 1918 and 1923, copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA.

- *Skin protection*, documented by four observers (Barclay 1924: 214; Dabbene 1911: 224; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 206; Lothrop 1928: 58-59): this function seems to have been entirely utilitarian and seems not to have had any visual/aesthetic or social/symbolic aspect. No visual records documenting this type of painting have been found so far.

Special occasions in which the Shelk'nam wore body painting include:

- *The birth of a baby*, documented by five authors (Lista 1887: 92-93; Payró 1898: 195; Beauvoir 1915: 208; De Agostini 1924: 283; L. Bridges 1951: 371). Texts describe that once the baby was born, his/her body was rubbed with pigment and saliva, apparently to clean it; there is also information about the application of a dark red facial design, with ornamental purposes -only documented by two authors- (Lista 1887:92-93; Bridges 1951:362). No visual records of this type of body painting use have been found, but this is quite expectable since witnessing the birth of a baby would have been extremely infrequent, particularly for a Western foreigner.
- *The first menstruation*, only recorded by one author: paintings worn during the first menstruation of girls were done in the maternal hut, where the girls were confined in silence, eating little food and drinking little water. During this period, girls were constantly visited by adult women, who gave them numerous instructions regarding their duties as adult women, specially about their future role as a wife, and emphasizing the importance of being hardworking and disciplined (Gusinde 1982[1931]: 383, 390). During this ritual, which was clearly individual<sup>9</sup>, female and private, the girl's face was painted with a specific design, which consisted of fine white lines radially displayed forming an arch, under the eyes and along the cheeks (ibid: 389). This facial painting was done by an adult woman -the girl's mother or a neighbour-. No visual records of this design have been found, but it is interesting to note that its only written verbal description includes a series of lines displayed on the cheeks in an arch form: it is possible then to suggest that there might exist a certain morphological similarity of this design with that worn for mood expression, described above - however, their colours differ, since this one is dark and that one is white or yellow.
- The "engagement" of a couple to get married, in which the future "groom" and "bride"<sup>10</sup> wore different designs (Gusinde 1982[1931]: 307). There is only one photographic record of this design, of an apparently

future "bride": it consists of several white vertical straight parallel segments, located across the face of the young woman, across the cheeks and nose; such segments are displayed on top of two white straight horizontal lines, each one on a cheek (figure 4). There is only one written record and one visual record (both which belong to the same author - Gusinde) about the use of this design, which reduces its reliability because it does not allow its confrontation with other independent records. However, the facial painting is unique and different from the total repertoire observed in the photographs and drawings of painted Shelk'nam persons, which suggests that it was probably a special design created for such occasion<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 4. "Engagement" bridal facial painting.



*Source:* Photo M. Gusinde taken between 1918 y 1923  
(copy held in ARC-FOT-AIA)

- Weddings: both the "groom" and "bride" had to be painted for this occasion, with designs called "*xáukesa*", which, according to the only source that documents them, were exactly the same for both (Gusinde 1982[1931]: 310-311). According to Gusinde, these designs were made with black paint. In spite of the fact that there are no photographs of this situation, there is a drawing that documents this design, which was composed by a series of rows of small dots, radially displayed from under the eyelids, along the cheeks (figure 5).

Figure 5. Wedding facial painting worn by the groom.



Source: Drawing published by M. Gusinde in 1931.

- The indication of the *xons* (*shamans*) role: *xons* had an important role in Shelk'nam society, since they were considered to be very powerful persons, who could heal or damage other persons (Bridges 1951:282-285; Chapman 1982: 45-46). Although both male and female *xons* did exist, we have only gathered information about male *xons* facial paintings. Four observers have provided information about these paintings: they consisted of a motif composed of three white dots, two on the temples and one between the eyes (Segers 1891: 69; Dabbene 1911: 260; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 207-208; Lothrop 1928: 96). This information about the design worn by the *xons* is confirmed with the photographs taken to several persons wearing this motif type -named "Gx" in our classification-: our research about their biographies indicates that all of them were *xons* (figure 6). Motif "Gx" could sometimes be combined with two horizontal lines laid out each one on each cheek, which made the design similar -though not identical- to motif type "E" described above. The main difference between motif type "Gx" and motif type "E" is that "E" locates each of the two dots on the cheeks, while "Gx" locates each of the two dots on the temples (compare figure 6 with figure 3). This detail, which might seem minor, and which emerges from the comparative analysis of all the photographed individuals who wore these motif types, had important social implications: even though according to the available information the *xon* role was acquired prior to the display of the design (and not constructed through the use of this facial painting), the use of motif type

"Gx", which was exclusive for *xons*, visually marked the existence of a social status of great importance and power within Shelk'nam society. Thus, this motif type did help to reproduce the role -and power- of the *xon*, each time he wore it.

Figure 6. Facial paintings worn by *xons*: motif type "Gx" combined with other motifs.



Source: Photos by M. Gusinde, taken between 1918 and 1923  
(copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA)

- *Mourning*: in spite of the fact that a total of nine direct observers have documented the existence of paintings worn as a sign of mourning, there is no consensus about the designs used for such situation (Lista 1887: 101; Segers 1891: 69; Popper 1891: 138; Gallardo 1910: 150; Borgatello 1929: 182; De Agostini 1924: 290; L. Bridges 1951: 364; Gusinde 1982[1931]: 209; Koppers 1991: 39). In addition to this, no visual records of Shelk'nam mourning paintings have been found so far, so they will not be discussed any further here.
- The *hain* (*male initiation ceremony to adulthood*): this ceremony was documented by an anonymous Salesian missionary in 1914 (later published by Belza 1974); by L. Bridges in *circa* 1900-1907 (1935, 1951) and by Gusinde in 1923 (1982[1931]). The *hain* had a double purpose: a) the intiation of male youngsters to adulthood, and b) the practice of female control by male individuals (both already initiated and "initiands"<sup>12</sup>, called *klóketen*), presenting themselves as spirits - who were embodied by wearing

body paintings and painted masks. In fact, both aims were deeply linked, since the initiation rite included not only the introduction of the young initiand to a series of physical and mental tests, but also to the knowledge of the "secret" that the spirits that appeared in the *bain* were in fact painted and masked men<sup>13</sup>. This ceremony was celebrated in a big hut, built specifically for such purpose, and located near a wooded area, away from the domestic camp and separated from it by a clear non-wooded area, which allowed visibility of the ceremonial hut from the camp. The entrance of the hut opened towards the east (where the wooded area was located), while the domestic camp was located towards the west, so that the entry or exit of men/spirits could not be viewed from the camp - thus helping to keep the "secret" (Gusinde 1982[1931], Chapman 1982, 1997).

Women were strictly excluded from the *bain* hut, although they did observe the different apparitions of the spirits from the camp (hence the need of spatial distance but direct visibility between the domestic camp and the ceremonial hut). This resulted of singular importance due to the fact that, besides other activities, men got painted and masked in the *bain* hut. Such production context was sacred, private, secret and exclusively male. It was essential that their preparation to embody the spirits were kept secret, since only in this way would it later have the desired effect on the initiands, and over women, who acted as the "public" of this ceremony (*sensu* Chapman 1982: 77). Once inside the ceremonial hut, the initiands fought against the spirits and were urged by initiated men to unmask the spirits: thus, unmasking their faces was a concrete action, but simultaneously a symbolic metaphor, that allowed them to "dis-cover" the mythical secret.

According to the available data, we have identified the designs of 13 main spirits: So'orte, Kosmenk, Matan, Tanu, Kotaix o Halalaches, Ulen, K'ternnen, Xalpen, Hashe, Wakus, Hainxo, Hainxohewan and Kulan (Bridges 1935 and 1951; Gusinde 1982[1931]; Chapman 1982, 1997). We have also gathered visual documents about the seven first spirits of this list (figure 7). Each one of them was painted with a specific design both on the body and on the mask, whose basic structure of plastic composition allows their visual identification (Fiore 2002, 2005). Over such basic design structure, numerous variations were created on the design of each spirit, which had deep symbolic implications for the role played by the spirit in the ceremony: such details will not be presented here since they are not

relevant for this paper's topic. The following is a very brief synthesis about the basic body painting design of these seven *hain* spirits:

1) So'orte wore a tight mask on his face and head (made of leather), which looked like a rounded hood, and his body painting design was composed by a background of colour -generally dark (either red or black)- on top of which big white dots are painted. There are seven variations of this main design, which are not relevant to this paper's topic and thus are not treated here.

2) Kosmenk wore a long triangular mask (made of bark) and his body painting design was composed by a red background, on top of which a wide vertical central line was painted; several wide parallel horizontal lines were painted crosscutting the previous one; all of them were usually painted in white.

3) Matan wore also a long triangular mask and his body painting design was composed by a red background, on top of which white vertical ovals were painted; sometimes white "irregular patches" were also added.

4) Kotaix o Halalhaches wore a tight leather mask with two long horizontal prongs (which to a Western observer look like "horns"), and his body painting design was composed by red and white wide horizontal bands.

5) Tanu was the only spirit whose paint was applied on top of a leather cloak (generally made of guanaco, with the fur inwards), which covered from the head (like a large hood) to the ankles: the painted design was composed by a red background, on top of which white straight vertical lines were painted, as well as vertical rows of small white dots, which alternated with each other; all of them end in a straight horizontal white line located in the upper part, between the hood and the rest of the cloak. The hood was also painted with a row of small white dots. The design was completed with white paint on the calves and feet, and this was the only place where paint was directly applied over the skin of the man embodying the spirit. The basic structure of this design is the same than that worn by men and women during of the *kewanix* dance (see below), when Tanu appeared from the ceremonial hut to presence such dance (Gusinde 1982[1931]). There are four variations of this main design, which are not relevant to this paper's topic and thus are not treated here.

6) Ulen wore a mask with a truncated cone shape (made of bark) and his body painting design was composed by a red background, on which fine straight white parallel horizontal lines were laid out along the

whole body; these were criss-crossed by a single fine straight white vertical line laid out along the thorax.

7) K'ternnen, who was a special being conceived during the ceremony (the son of the malignant female and powerful spirit Xalpén and one of the initiands), wore a long triangular mask and his<sup>14</sup> body painting design was composed by a red background on top of which a white broad and vertical line was painted along the thorax and abdomen; several white straight fine vertical parallel lines were also painted along the body, and numerous small feather balls were attached, giving him a very soft appearance and texture.

So'orte, Kosmenk, Matan, Kotaix/Halalhaches and K'ternnen also have in common that their body painting designs included their forearms and calves were generally painted in white, contrasting with the body background, which was generally dark (red, black or both).

Figure 7. *Hain* spirits masked and painted. From left to right: So'orte, Kosmenk, Matan, Kotaix or Halalhaches, Tanu, Ulen and K'ternnen.



Source: Photos taken by M. Gusinde, taken in 1923  
(copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA)

The initiands also wore paintings that identified them as such (figure 8). Of these, the one that covered them entirely with white paint is similar to that described for "wrestling" (figure 8-left), while the design that covers them entirely with a dark colour (probably red) and with two white straight vertical parallel lines along their shoulders, torsos, pelvis and thighs (figure 8-right), is a design exclusively recorded for this role in particular (Fiore 2002).



Figure 8. Body painting designs worn by initiands during the *hain*.

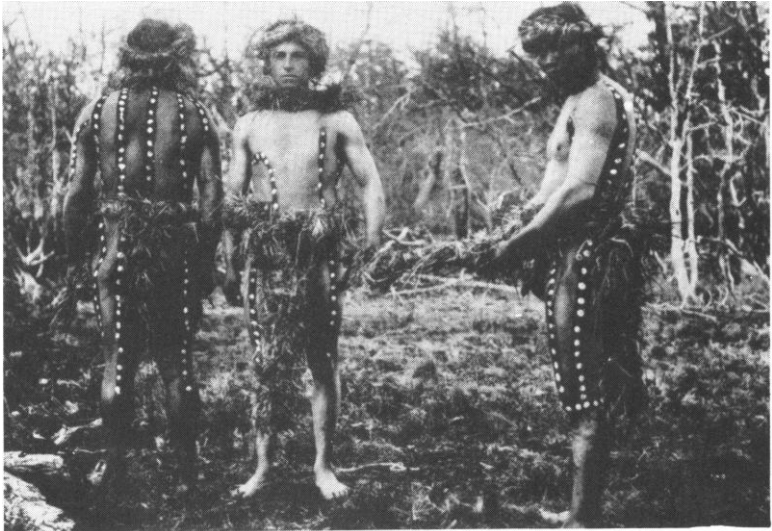


Source: Photos by M. Gusinde, taken in 1923, copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA.

During the *hain* the Shelk'nam performed some dances of great symbolic significance for this society - we will focus here on the visual aspects of their body designs. The *oshkonbaninh* was a phallic dance performed exclusively by men which required the use of a design composed by straight vertical lines with white dots superimposed on them (figure 9), combined with plant fiber ornaments (Gusinde 1982[1931]). In turn, the *kewanix* was a dance performed by both men and women (Bridges 1951, Gusinde 1982[1931]: 958-959, Chapman 1982: 181), which required the display of designs that were basically composed by a red background applied over the whole body, on top of which different designs were painted; these were composed by combining white straight lines of fine or medium width (mostly vertical), rows of white dots, quadrangular figures made with white dots, and wider white bands, generally located on the chest (figure 10). As noted above, these designs have the same basic structure that Tanu's design, as this spirit was a witness to the *kewanix* dances. In spite of their high geometrism, each of the *kewanix* designs had clear symbolic implications which operated as emblems related to Shelk'nam exogamic kinship units -*sho'ons*- (Gusinde 1982[1931]: 909, 962; Chapman 1986; 134, 181).

Besides the social and symbolic meanings of these designs, the structure of their plastic composition allows for their clear identification within the total corpus of Shelk'nam body painting designs, and visually distinguishes them from other designs worn in other situations.

Figure 9. Paintings and ornaments worn during the *osbkonhaninh* dance.



Source: Photo M. Gusinde, taken in 1923, copy held in ARC-FOT-AIA.

Figure 10. Body painting designs worn by men and by women during the *kewanix* dance.



Source: Photos by M. Gusinde, taken in 1923, copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA.

In sum, most of the motifs and designs presented here are exclusively Shelk'nam and have not been observed in other Fuegian societies such as the Yamana or Alakaluf (Fiore 2002, 2005, 2007). The specific identification of these designs as Shelk'nam has allowed to trained people, to identify in some occasions members of this society in photographs, using their painted designs as visual cues. In turn, this helps to identify these designs and ascribe them to this particular Fuegian society when they are contemporarily re-used in diverse material culture media, be it through detailed copies or through free adaptations led by artistic creativity and/or by interest in generating an object of greater potential commercial value. A preliminary analysis of such adaptations and re-uses of these designs will be presented below.

### *Mask decoration*

The Shelk'nam did not decorate their material culture objects, except for their ceremonial masks worn by the *hain* spirits, and the guanaco skin cloak worn by Tanu spirit (see details below)<sup>15</sup>. Masks worn in the *hain* by men embodying spirits were painted with the same colours than their bodies, and with matching designs. There were two mask types: *tolon*, which were conical, made of bark or leather; and *así*, which looked like hoods and were made with leather. As noted above, these formed part of the designs which allowed for the visual identification of each spirit.

Both mask decoration and mask fitting were always carried out in the *hain* ceremonial hut (Gusinde 1982, Chapman 1982), that is, in a ceremonial, private, secret and male context which only included already initiated adult men and male youngsters/initiands; non-initiated persons (women, non-initiated male youngsters and children) were excluded.

After their use in the *hain*, masks were hidden in a wooded area near the hut (*idem*). If they were preserved, they could be reclaimed and reused in the following ceremony. But due to bad conservation conditions, these could decay, making it necessary to make new masks.

### **Current uses of ancient images: forms of re-use and adaptation of Shelk'nam body art in Western contemporary material culture**

In this section we offer a preliminary panorama of the different current uses of images of painted Shelk'nam persons and/or of their body painting designs. This panorama does not aim to cover extensively any of the

material culture forms (artefacts, artworks or images) treated here, which could clearly be object of particular studies focused on each type of material or each artist, artisan or producer. Rather, the specific aim of this section is to offer the results of the above mentioned observations and surveys carried out in the cities of Ushuaia, Puerto Williams and Punta Arenas, which in this case have been aimed to identify images of traditional Shelk'nam art that have been used as referents represented in these different media. These media include a great number of material culture items: pottery figurines, painted wooden plaques, wooden plaques with bassrelief images, murals and building facades intervened with different techniques (e.g. painting, adhesion of coloured photos, etc.), bark or wood masks, paper or cardboard posters, jewellery pieces (e.g. earrings, necklaces made in metal, wood, etc.) plastic and metal pins, decorative patches to saw on clothing items or backpacks, stickers, and artworks created by one or several mixed techniques. In the creation of this panorama of the current uses of traditional Shelk'nam art, we have focused on the type of referent chosen by the producers in the present, observing the kinds of images created on one or several media.

Firstly, when assessing the image corpus gathered in our surveys of current material culture, it becomes noticeable that the most commonly chosen type of referent of Shelk'nam art are *hain* spirits. This is probably due to the fact that *hain* spirits gather a series of conditions that stimulate interest in reproducing and/or recreating them: they are “original”, that is, they are rare images, different to those commonly seen in current Western societies; they are “exotic”, that is, they clearly come from cultural contexts which are different from Western culture; and they stimulate the curiosity of the viewers due to the human quality of their anthropomorphic morphology, which is simultaneously distant from them due to their masked faces. However, not all spirits have been equally chosen as referents (see below). Also, the forms of reproduction of the images vary substantially, from accurate copies of the designs recorded in early photographs, to simplified adaptations of these designs, and even to free versions which are far from the original referents.

This is visible in many of the cases under study. For example: in the figures painted on wooden tablets (figure 11a) several spirit images are very similar to the photographs taken by Gusinde in 1923 to Kosmenk, Matan, Tanu, Kotaix and Ulen spirits (compare to figure 7). Some small modifications are noticeable for example in Ulen's mask, which in the

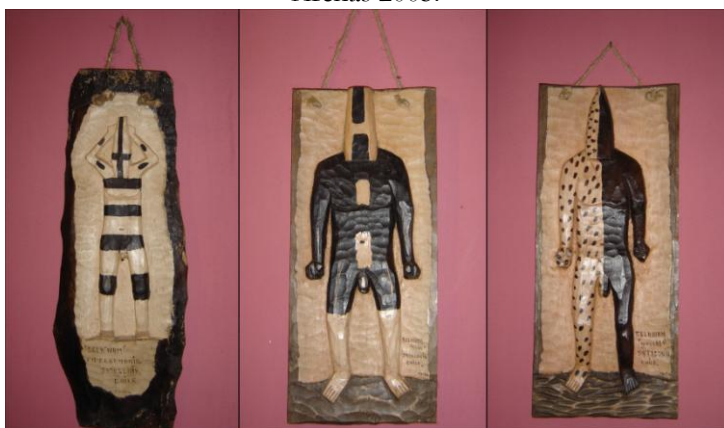
current version is not a truncated cone as in the traditional one, or in Matan's patches, which are more rectangular than those worn by this spirit in the photographs; and the smiling face of Kotaix is clearly a current addition to his image. In other figures made in bass relief on wooden tablets, the designs are even more different than the traditional ones, specially the spirit on the right, which could be a So'ort, but his mask does not correspond to that traditionally worn by this spirit (figure 11b).

Figure 11a. Figures of *hain* spirits painted on wooden tablets, Punta Arenas 2013.



Source: Photo by Ana Butto.

Figure 11b. Figures of *hain* spirits sculpted on wooden tablets, Punta Arenas 2005.



Source: Photo by Dánae Fiore.

The same happens with the ceramic figurines, in which free adaptations of the Kotaix design are observed; there is also the creation of a new design that seems to combine that of Kosmenk with the rows of dots worn in the *kewanix* dance (figure 12a). Other ceramic figurines are, however, much more accurate copies of different variations of Kosmenk's design, which we have been able to trace back directly to individual photographs taken by Gusinde in 1923: these clearly show that the figurine designs are almost identical to the traditional ones –this is the case of the figurine on the right, and of the figurine on the left–; others are simplifications of these, but keep their structure of composition intact –for example, the figurine in the centre– (figure 12b). All these pieces are objects found for sale in crafts shops and/or artifacts used as decoration in hotels, which clearly places them in commercial use contexts, specially linked to tourism. Interestingly, in the latter case, which is the most accurate in terms of the closeness between the pottery figurine with original referents in the photographs, each piece was for sale in a box that included a brochure that explained details about the *hain* ceremony and the meaning of the spirits (figure 12, centre, see brochure behind the figurine). In this sense, it would seem that the producers of these artefacts were interested in providing the buyer with information about the Indigenous cultural context about these represented referents –the *hain* spirits–referring both to their ethnic origin and to their symbolic value for the Shelk'nam.

Figure 12a. Figurines of *hain* spirits made on ceramic, Punta Arenas 2013.



Source: Photo by Ana Butto.

Figure 12b. Figurines of *hain* spirits made on ceramic, Ushuaia 2005 (above) and their comparison to *hain* body painting designs in photographs taken by M. Gusinde in 1923.



Source: Photos by Dánae Fiore and photos M. Gusinde taken in 1923 (copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA)

Images of these spirits also decorate the façade of a restaurant, the outside of a bus, and several pins and patches produced for tourist consumption as “souvenirs” (figures 13 and 14). In the first case, the designs are simplified adaptations that result similar to the *Kosmenk* spirits of the *Shelk’nam hain*. In addition, the restaurant is also decorated with a photograph of a *Shelk’nam* family (whose members are wearing facial paintings). In the second case, the tourist bus is decorated with photographs of a *Matan* spirit (in large size), two *So’ort* spirits (in smaller size), and a man wearing *kewanix* designs. This is the only case in which we have identified the use of *So’ort* spirits in all our surveys. In spite of the



fact that So'ort were central spirits in the *hain* and that there are numerous photographs that document them, it is possible that this referent selection –i.e. the decision not to use So'ort as a represented referent– may have been related to the fact that, for current observers, the morphology of So'ort, with his tightly hooded head, might not result visually attractive. This would reduce the image's aesthetic value and as a consequence its consumption would decrease. In fact, in all congress presentations, postgraduate courses and conferences for the general public in which I have shown images of this spirit, my colleagues, students and public have generally commented that So'ort was “scary”, “creepy”, “sinister”, etc. Even though these comments do not come from systematic surveys about this topic, they suggest that it is possible that such sensations may have guided different material culture producers not to select this spirit as a referent when reproducing images of painted Shelk'nam persons.

Figure 13. Hain spirit designs and other body painting designs in restaurant facade in Puerto Williams 2013 (left) and in tourist bus in Ushuaia 2005 (right).



Source: Photographs by Ana Butto (left) and Dánae Fiore (right)



Figure 14. Pins and patches for sale in tourist shops in Punta Arenas, 2013; note the mixture of "ethnic" topics with sports, politics, fauna, etc.



Source: Photographs by Ana Butto

Contrary to this case, the image of Kosmenk spirit is clearly the most frequently selected for its reproduction or adaptation in different media. These are almost exact reproductions of simplified versions of the above mentioned photographs, in this case in murals and posters generally located in touristic places such as crafts shops and restaurants (figure 15), as well as in jewelry pieces (figure 16). There are also free adaptations, such as the mural produced by an art team named Grupo Escaleno (Ushuaia), in which Kosmenk appears with a body painting design exactly equal to that recorded in one photo in 1923, and in black and white just like in such photo, but with his masked head notoriously tilted towards his left (towards the right of the viewer), and with his arms bent in front of his torso, with his hands joined with the palms upwards, and with a sign hanging from his neck, with a suggestive text written in red: “yo soy” (“I am”). This street artwork picks up on a well known image of Shelk’nam iconography but intervenes it in such a way –subtly in its morphology and boldly in the added text– that transforms it in a new image that interpellates the observer and stimulates him/her to reflect on the message contained in it. What does “I am” mean?: does it imply that the figure *is* a spirit?; does it imply that he *is* a painted and masked person whose

Indigenous society has been ignored by Western society, into which the former has been forcefully immersed. His gesture with the tilted head and open hands (which face the viewer instead of holding the mask, as in the original photograph), changes the spirit's body posture and transforms it from distant and solid to vulnerable and close to the viewer. His black and white colour hints to an "ancient" image, while his sign with red letters contrasts with such dark background and dialogues with the "modern" viewer. Its location, in a public space, also changes the spirit's context, which originally belonged to a private and sacred context. In such sense, this street artwork stands out as different from other current images that represent Kosmenk, insofar as it breaks away from the mainly decorative and commercial functions identified above, and proposes a critical message materialised in a new visual discourse.

Figure 15. Kosmenk spirits in murals and signs in Puerto Williams (above), Punta Arenas (below left and centre) and Ushuaia (below right).



Source: Photographs Dánae Fiore and Ana Butto.

Figure 16. Kosmenk spirit in jewellery piece, Punta Arenas 2013; compared to a photo of a Kosmenk spirit taken by Gusinde in 1923.



Source: Photographs Ana Butto.

Other *hain* spirits have also been selected, with less frequency, to be represented in different media, such as Kotaix, which not only appears in the wooden figures and ceramic figurines presented above, but also in jewellery pieces (figure 17). A case of greater visual richness is that of Ulen: even though this spirit has not been frequently reproduced as Kosmenk, Ulen has been represented and visually adapted to different current art media, without distorting its original design, which allows for its straightforward identification. Ulen appears in an urban mural (figure 18, above) and in contemporary fine art pieces. One of them (by C. Fierro D.; undated) is composed by six masked Ulen heads, produced in different colours and framed in squares with a certain resemblance to the famous pop series painted by A. Warhol (figure 18, right). Another artwork (by L. Benedit, 1992/1993) shows Ulen painted in ochre colours: the figure is placed next to two geometric figures of Patagonian Indigenous art known in archaeology as “*grecas*” (frets) also commonly known as “*guarda pampa*” (pampa stripe), and is partially covered by the figure of a monkey sitting towards the right of the image, who stares at the geometric figures and at Ulen (figure 18, below). The art piece is completed by a sign painted over a colourful background that reads “*Y Darwin no tenía razón*” (“AND DARWIN WAS NOT RIGHT”), followed by a letter “A” inside a circumference<sup>16</sup>. The conjunction of the monkey and the sign about Darwin –commonly taken as an example of those voyagers who had negative opinions about the Fueguians– suggest a critical vision about the discourses that undermine the Fueguian and Patagonian Indigenous societies, each one represented by an icon of their visual culture: Ulen, and the *grecas*/*guardas pampa*, respectively.

Figure 17. Kotaix spirit in jewellery pieces, Punta Arenas 2013



Source: Photographs by Ana Butto.

Figure 18. Ulen spirits: mural, Punta Arenas 2013 (above left); artwork by L. Bedit, Buenos Aires 2013 (below, left); postcard of artwork by C. Fierro, Puerto Williams 2013 (right).



Source: Photographs by Dánae Fiore and Anta Butto.

Finally, the images of spirits have also been represented by focusing on their masks. Although the study of masks is a research topic in itself (which goes far from the scope of this paper), it is relevant to point out the production of these types of objects by artists such as Renata Rafalak, who has thoroughly researched about the traditional forms of mask production by Fuegian societies, creating bark masks (of *Nothofagus*) and painting them with Indigenous designs as well as with designs of her own (figure 19, above). Also, Yatana park (Ushuaia), which contains and protects a *Nothofagus* forest, and is directed and sponsored by artist Mónica Alvarado, develops an educational plan concerned with environmental issues linked to art and ancestral knowledge of Indigenous cultures. The parks' railings are decorated with representations of numerous artefacts and images of Fuegian and Patagonian Indigenous art, including masks (figure 19, centre). Masks also appear in urban art (figure 19, below left) and even in the logo of the Secretaría de Cultura del Gobierno de la Provincia de Tierra del Fuego (Culture Secretary of the Government of Tierra del Fuego Province; figure 19, below right). Interestingly, these masks could be taken as a metonymy of the spirits, an essential “part” of them that represents their “whole”. However, in practice, since they are being used in contexts which are so distant from those where they have originally been created and used, masks seem to operate as a kind of icon of Fuegian Indigenous peoples as a whole: all of them wore masks, and, in fact, several of the above mentioned masks have designs which could be

identified with those traditionally created not only by the Shelk'nam, but also by other Fuegian societies such as the Yamana/Yagan and the Alakaluf/Kaweskar.

Figure 19. Masks: art studio and artwork by R. Rafalak, Ushuaia 2005  
(*above*); Yatana park (*centre*); mural (*below left*);  
Secretaría de Turismo (*below right*), Ushuaia 2013.

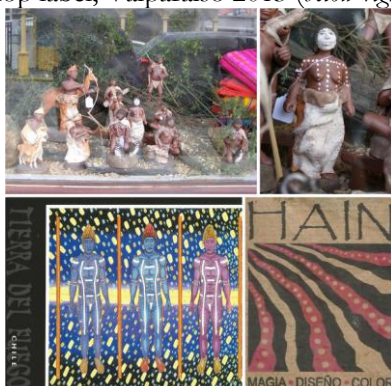


Source: Photographs by Dánae Fiore and Ana Butto.

Other body painting images which are not related to spirits appear in a smaller proportion in current material culture. We have identified designs inspired on the *kewanix* body paintings which appear, in adapted forms, in ceramic figurines: this is the only case of female body painting –not just facial painting– recorded in our surveys (figure 20, above). These designs are also observable in an artwork (documented in a postcard edited in Chile, which does not mention the author; photo taken by F. Krause; figure 20, below left), in which one *kewanix* design has been reproduced in several frames and in different colours –blue, light blue and lilac– thus changing the original red, black and white colour palette and, again, generating a resemblance with Warhol's pop art style. The basic motif of the *kewanix* designs –red and black bands with superimposed rows of white

dots– also appears in a sticker used in a gift shop in Valparaíso (Chile), whose brand name is, interestingly, *hain* (figure 20, below right). The process of free adaptation of the original designs to produce the sticker image has generated a deep distance between the resulting image from the original referent, which greatly hinders its identification. It has been transformed from a geometric and symbolic body painting design to a geometric abstract gift sticker. Without the link established by the term “*hain*” and without a knowledge about Shelk’nam art iconography, recognising its original referent would be impossible.

Figure 20. *Kewanix* body painting designs: ceramic figurines, Ushuaia 2013 (above, left and right); postcard -no author-, Puerto Williams 2013 (below left); shop label, Valparaíso 2013 (below right).



Source: Relevamiento Dánae Fiore.

Facial paintings for everyday life situations has also been reproduced in different current material culture forms. This is observable in a painted street mural, where in the forefront a man with an anguished expression wears one of the most typical Shelk’nam facial painting designs (one horizontal line on each cheek - motif type "F" in our classification), and opens his arms in a sign of despair; in the background a Kosmenk spirit is also visible (figure 21, above left). The same facial painting design is visible in a street art image produced by Grupo Escaleno, based on a black and white photograph of a Shelk’nam woman with her children (taken by Gusinde in the 1920's). Interestingly, this photograph has been edited and intervened with an eloquent sign, typed in an industrial font and printed in red colour, which reads: "Madre Tierra, he aquí a tus Hijos"



(“Mother Earth, Here Are Your Childrem”<sup>17</sup>). With this street artwork, the image is making visible the “invisibilized” Indigenous peoples who have almost been wiped out from their land (note that the term “Tierra” in Tierra del Fuego stands both for “land” and “earth”). Thus, expressed via different techniques, the social sense of both images is quite similar: they express claims for the injustice and abuses suffered by Shelk’nam people, and body painting is one of the ways in which members of this society are visually represented.

The same facial painting is appreciated in an instalation by L. Benedit (figure 21, below left and centre), which includes paintings of iconic images of Indigenous peoples of Argentina: those of Ceferino Namuncurá (son of a Mapuche chief in Patagonia, beatified by the Vatican in 2007), and the face of a young Shelk’nam wearing motif types “E” and “F”. This individual, apparently anonymous, is totally identifiable with the photographic portrait of Toin already mentioned above (compare with figure 3).

The face of a young Shelk’nam man wearing facial painting is represented in the work of visual artist Mónica Alvarado, which includes numerous images relative to the Fueguian Indigenous societies – particularly Yagan/Yamana– (figure 21). In this case, which belongs to the exhibition *Los Secretos Del Silencio*, the facial painting design does not match exactly any of those identified by us in our research, but rather seems to be a free creation which, nevertheless, bears similarities with other Shelk’nam designs (compare with figures 2 and 5).

Figure 21. Shelk'nam facial paintings; murals, Ushuaia 2013 (above left and right); artwork by L. Benedit, Buenos Aires 2003 (below left and centre); detail from artwork by Mónica Alvarado -copy kindly provided by the artist- (below right).



Source: Survey by Dánae Fiore.

Finally, we present here the case of the image of a Shelk'nam woman, Angela Loij, who was photographed by M. Gusinde wearing facial paintings in 1923 (figure 22, above left). This photograph was later published by ethnographer A. Chapman, retouching it in order to eliminate such painting at Angela's request, since she stated that the painting had only been worn at Gusinde's request (Chapman 1982 and Chapman personal communication 2002; figure 22, above right). A new retouched version of this photograph has been identified during one of our surveys, in the advertisement poster of a petrol station in Ushuaia. Here Angela's image has been reproduced four times, each image framed in a square, where her face and background are represented in different shiny contrasting colours, following in a straightforward manner Warhol's pop art style series of celebrities portraits (figure 22, below). Thus, Angela's image, which had initially been retouched to eliminate facial painting from it, has now been retouched again, placed in an urban context and used in an advertisement poster, transforming it in an icon of Western visual culture, but with Fuegian roots.

Figure 22. Transformed images of Angela Loij; photo by Gusinde 1923 (above left); photo retouched by A. Chapman 1982 (above right); advertisement in petrol station with Angela Loij images, Ushuaia 2013 (below).



Sources: above: Photo by M. Gusinde 1923 and Chapman 1982, copies held in ARC-FOT-AIA; below: photos by Dánae Fiore.



## **Conclusions. The transmutation of Shelk'nam art from a hunter-gatherer traditional context to a contemporary Southamerican context**

The analysis of different traditional contexts of production and use of Shelk'nam body paintings suggest that the practice of painting the body was related, among other factors, with the ductility offered by this technique: its use was possible in a great variety of situations since the images created were not permanent, but rather ephemeral. This helped the designs displayed by a person in a certain situation not to contradict those displayed by the same person in another situation. When seen as a social product, body paintings can be interpreted as means of construction of such situations, put in action through the practice of social agents in quotidian and ceremonial contexts. Without paintings, mourning was incomplete, the first menstruation was not marked in the young woman, and the representation of *hain* spirits was impossible. Thus, it is evident that in this hunter-gatherer society body painting was not only a means of expressing a meaning, but a mechanism of production of ephemeral visual realities, which had deep social implications, since they operated to mark roles and relationships which were fundamental for the development and reproduction of the Shelk'nam mode of life.

In turn, the panorama offered by the reproductions and adaptations of Shelk'nam iconography of painted persons and body painting designs in current material culture media shows a deep series of transmutations of these images.

In the first place, the selected images have suffered different degrees of transformations. We have identified some reproductions which are extremely faithful to the traditional designs, adaptations that simplify them and even free creations different from the original designs, but clearly inspired on them. Given the ephemeral character of this art form, and given the disintegration of Shelk'nam sociocultural practices due to their deep transculturation, photography has operated as a crucial axis along which this visual re/production process took place: without using those ancient images as referents, the creation of these new images would have been deeply hindered. When comparing the early photographs with the current images, it is clear that the main visual element that has been maintained is the *bidimensional form* of body painting designs, while colour and size have suffered many more alterations. The maintenance of bidimensional form – both the figure's perimeter and the internal components that structure the

design— is what has allowed a specific referent (e.g. a Kosmenk spirit) to be identified in different media. *Threedimensional form* has clearly experienced several transmutations, insofar as the process started with body paintings (in a 3D body), it then has passed through photographs (2D) and then through images attached to 2D media (e.g. murals, wooden tablets, pins, patches, posters, canvasses) or 3D media (figurines, jewelry). Colour has suffered numerous transmutations: from coloured Indigenosu designs to black and white photographs, to figures which reproduce these designs visible in black and white photographs but are “coloured” according to descriptions in historical-ethnographic texts, to creations that use new colours which are totally different from the original ones. In few cases, the new creations are made in black and white, keeping closer to what is visible in the early photographs than to the traditional colours worn by the Shelk’nam. Finally, *size* has been clearly adapted according to the material culture object used as media to bear the image.

In the second place, given that these materials are produced in a Western and capitalist context, many of them have been produced for sale: thus, images have passed from having a single use value in a hunter-gatherer context, to having, in many cases, an exchange value in the new Western context. In this sense, the new contexts of production and use have clearly influenced the type of image created and the ways of viewing and consuming them. In all surveys we have recorded cases of objects produced for sale, specially as tourist souvenirs (e.g. statuettes, pins, patches, jewellery, etc.), as well as advertisements for restaurants, crafts shops, etc. In most of these cases the body painting image is distanced from its original context and from its specific cultural implications, and in turn operates as a icon of a distant “other” who is culturally different and “exotic”. Such change of context implied also, in some cases, the detachment from and ignorance about the originary *hain* ceremonial context, which was secret, private and gender-specific. On the contrary, *hain* spirits are now exposed, viewed and consumed in entirely quotidian and public situations – they decorate facades of restaurants, buses and souvenirs. Moreover, while the Shelk’nam never allowed anybody to photograph them while painting their masks or while being unmasked in the ceremonial hut –because this would betray their secret– (Fiore 2002) now masks form part of a repertoire of art objects and consumption goods. But, simultaneously, this also makes visible the existence of this

Fuegian Indigenous society and generates potential interest in the public to learn more about its culture.

In the third place, different to the cases primarily oriented towards consumerism, among the works of urban art, artworks and installations mentioned above, we find examples of free adaptations of traditional body painting designs, whose subtle but effective changes respect of the original images generate a new visual discourse. Thus, new media and new techniques are used to create new art forms that make visible several historical, social and cultural contents about the Indigenous Fuegian peoples. Fragments of early iconographies have been taken and intervened to resignify them, questioning the observer in an explicit manner: cases like a Kosmenk spirit wearing a typical painting but with a body posture different to the traditional one, a Shelk'nam mother with her children painted with traditional designs but intervened with a sign, or a portrait of a Fuegian native wearing facial painting and associated to the icons of other Indigenous "personalities" from Fuego-Patagonia, are clear examples of these procedures. These new images help to shift the public's gaze from *looking* to *seeing*. They are thus contributing to generate a new visual discourse, which, in spite of being diverse and incipient, breaks the silence and whispers a subtle message against ethnocentric discourses, thus helping to generate awareness about the absence/presence of the Shelk'nam in Tierra del Fuego.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term “body painting” refers to painted designs displayed in any body portion, including the head and the face. The term “facial painting” will be used to refer to the painting of such specific body portion.

<sup>2</sup> The conceptual and practical differences between the different disciplines that develop and apply the theoretical perspective of art as a social product –anthropology, sociology, history and archaeology of art– will not be treated in this paper, but can be traced through the bibliography quoted here.

<sup>3</sup> The works of art produced by Renata Rafalak and Mónica Alvarado may constitute research topics on themselves: however, these are out of the scope of this paper, and only specific examples of artworks created by these artists will be treated here.

<sup>4</sup> The use of red colour was documented by: Sarmiento de Gamboa (1557), B and G Nodal (1621), Labbe (1711), anonymous author (1765) in Schindler (1995), FitzRoy (1839), Darwin (1845), Lista (1887), Segers (1891: 60), Payro (1898), Beauvoir (1915), Gallardo (1910), Dabbene (1911), Borgatello (1929: 181), De Agostini (1924), Lothrop (1928: 58-59), L. Bridges (1951: 366-367), Cojazzi (1914), Gusinde (1982: 956-957).

<sup>5</sup> The use of white colour was documented by: B and G Nodal (1621), Labbe (1711), anonymous author (1765) in Schindler (1995), Banks (1768), FitzRoy (1839), Darwin (1845), Lista (1887), Segers (1891: 69), Payro (1898), Beauvoir (1915), Gallardo (1910), Dabbene (1911), Borgatello (1929: 181), De Agostini (1924), L. Bridges (1951: 366-367), Gusinde (1982: 206-211), Lothrop (1928: 58-59).

<sup>6</sup> The use of black colour was documented by: Labbe (1711), anonymous author (1765) in Schindler (1995), Banks (1768), FitzRoy (1839), Darwin (1845), Lista (1887), Segers (1891: 69), Popper (1887, 1891), Payro (1898), Beauvoir (1915), Gallardo (1910), Borgatello (1929: 181), De Agostini (1924: 276), Gusinde (1982: 206-211), Lothrop (1928: 58-59), L. Bridges (1951: 367).

<sup>7</sup> The use of yellow colour was documented by: Gallardo (1910), Dabbene (1911), Barclay (1926), De Agostini (1924), Lothrop (1928), L. Bridges (1951).

<sup>8</sup> Note that in the early photographs, which are black and white, red hues are not always clearly distinguishable, so in these cases we decided to indicate that they are “dark” paintings; only when the contrast is good

enough do we indicate that the design is “probably red” or “probably black”.

<sup>9</sup> In spite of the fact that in such ritual an adult woman participated, counselled and painted the young girl, the individual nature of this ritual is based on the fact that the young girl is the focus of attention: there are neither other initiated girls nor other participants or external observers participating in this ritual.

<sup>10</sup> These terms are quoted in inverted commas since they belong to a clearly Western vocabulary, whose translation from Indigenous concepts may not have been precise.

<sup>11</sup> Yet the design may have been intentionally painted just to take the photograph, which may not necessarily document a real "bride" or a real wedding ceremony.

<sup>12</sup> We use the term “*initiand*” to identify the youngsters who were introduced to the ceremony for the first time: once the initiation passed, these men would be considered as initiated adults in the following *hain* ceremonies.

<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that the Shelk'nam did not believe in mythical spirits, since both men and women did believe in them (Chapman 1982: 70). According to Chapman, women did know or suspect that the spirits they saw coming out from the *hain* hut were in fact men, but, at the same time, they believed in the real existence of spirits (ibid: 146, Chapman 1997: 107). However, Angela Loij, one of Chapman's informants told her that “*the spirits didn't look like men. You could never tell they were!*” (Chapman 1982: 88). Hence there is a certain ambivalence regarding the femal appreciation of the real spirits and of their representations: this ambivalence contributed to the continuity of the *hain* ceremony, since in spite of the women's knowledge and suspicions about “the hoax” (sensu Chapman 1982), they still acted as if the *hain* spirits were real.

<sup>14</sup> K'terrnen could be male or female; in this case we refer to him as male since the photographs that document this spirit come from the 1923 *hain* witnessed by Gusinde, in which this specific spirit was male.

<sup>15</sup> There are very few quotations that indicate that the Shelk'nam covered some of their artefacts with paint (Nodal 1621, anonymous in Schindler 1995), yet this seems to have been a practice aimed at protecting leather objects from humidity and/or aimed to give them greater flexibility (Gusinde 1982: 1099). We have also identified one quotation that states that paint was used “to make the *object* or body more beautiful” (Gusinde

1982:1099, our emphasis and our translation); but this is not enough to verify the existence of artefact decoration in this society.

<sup>16</sup> Another sign underneath to the previous one reads: "VENIT MIHT DARWIN IN MAENTEN"; these words are crossed out by a line.

<sup>17</sup> In Argentina, "mother earth" is a term commonly mentioned in Spanish to refer to Indigenous lore, particularly from the Northwest region (where "mother earth" is known as Pachamama). This term regards earth as a nurturing mother which gives life to all living creatures –plants, animals and people– and which therefore has to be respected and thanked for through rituals in which offerings are tributed to Pachamama.

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