Mari Lyn Salvador has been working with the Kuna Indians of Panama for more thirty years. She has focused her research on molas, Kuna women’s traditional blouses. Her approach centers on Ethnoaesthetics, a concern for aesthetics and beauty from the perspectives of the artists themselves.

THE ART OF BEING KUNA, an exhibition created by the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, is based on collaboration between anthropologists with long-term research projects in Kuna Yala and between these scholars and their Kuna collaborators. In addition to years of anthropological research in the areas of language, history, social and political organization, healing, music and ritual, the project involved 12 years of research in collections of historic molas, photographs and archival materials in Europe as well as the United States. During this time, four Kuna specialists interpreted and documented the Kuna collections of the Heye Foundation made in the early 1900’s. It is now housed at the National Museum of the American Indian. The exhibition illustrates Kuna ideas regarding the environment and Kuna history as well as Kuna concern for form, beauty and expression in language and political discourse, hospitality and healing as well as the visual arts. The exhibition is intended to support Kuna efforts to preserve their culture as well as protect their political autonomy.