

## **Finding Craftsmanship and Cooperation in Peru**

**Catharine Ellis**

What is it that compels a craftsperson to excellence? To go beyond what is necessary and to work in cooperation with others?

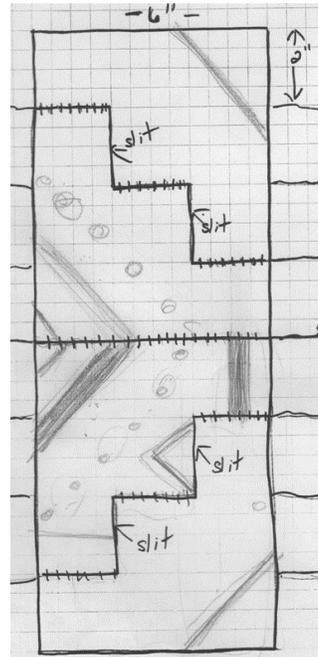
Early in my own weaving career I learned 4 selvedge weaving from Navajo rug weavers. This experience has stayed with me and done more to sensitize my appreciation and understanding of the textiles we saw in Peru than any other preparation I could have done.

The Wari (Huarii) tapestry tunic that we saw at Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology was my first indication that things are not always as they first appear. When examining this piece of cloth, I was astounded to realize that the warp actually ran in the horizontal direction of the tunic. This means that this piece of cloth was woven more than 2 meters in width and only a half-meter tall. As I am more familiar with the back strap weaving of Guatemala, I had always incorrectly assumed that an individual weaver wove these fabrics as long, narrow panels. The wide cloth indicates that several people could have woven on this cloth at one time, making it a communal effort that could be accomplished more quickly. The repeating patterns with subtle color and motif variations suggest that each weaver had the freedom to interpret and vary the pattern. Yet the overall palette and design were completely harmonious.



The large Wari tie-dyed piece at the Museo Amano likely represents another type of cooperation. Many years ago, I was involved in an exploratory weaving project in collaboration with art historian, Jane Rehl. We attempted to duplicate this type of scaffold weaving, creating multi-selvedged pieces that were later resist dyed and then

sewn together to achieve the larger textile. Initially we made the assumption that large blankets of these pieces might have been woven together as one large blanket and dyed while still connected. After setting up scaffold looms, we realized that only two pieces need be woven at one time. These small weavings, when done with a group of people, resulted in a cooperative spirit of building something together. After the individual pieces were dyed in different colors, the entire textile was sewn together.



While visiting the Weaving Center in Chinchero we watched two women preparing a warp. I was struck by how these two women (one older, one young) tossed the balls of yarn back and forth in the rhythmic dance of warping. Nilda told us how each woman wove her own individual textiles, but was helped along the way in the spinning, warping, and dyeing processes. I have the honor of bringing home a textile that Nilda warped and her mother wove. And it wasn't enough to weave a piece with 4 excellent selvages. Each piece of cloth was finished with an additional woven binding that completely encased the selvedge, strengthening the cloth and adding another element for its complexity and beauty.



While visiting Machu Picchu we saw astounding Inca dry stone masonry at Machu Picchu. What is it that compelled these architects/craftsman to carry, cut, and fit stone with such precision and mastery? Rocks that weighed tons were cut and fitted like small Legos. It required large communities of people working together. Even walkways and water channels required the work and precision of many. We saw how families worked together on the Uros Floating Islands who regularly renewed and replaced the reed to keep their islands afloat.



In our western countries, we are most apt to work alone, mastering our craft and accomplishing the work as individuals. We tend to put emphasis on MY work, MY process. We witnessed a different approach amongst the craftsmen of Peru, both past and present. Several years ago, while working with weavers in India, I observed them working together, always with many hands on the same piece of cloth. The spirit of cooperation that we say in Peru was similar. The Peruvian craftsmen shared their labor, yet also shared the experience.