Philippine indigenous arts are as diverse as its islands, as complicated as its waterways, as varied as its languages and as unique as its people. Throughout the 7,107 islands the Philippine archipelago has, it offers unique places and cultures where all forms of arts and crafts can flourish, some can be considered spectacular by the outsider, such as the Ifugao rice terraces that native Ifugaos built by hand, our own version of the Great Pyramids. But there are still some that could be considered as taboo by other cultures, such as the distinctive tattoos tribal headhunters have. Philippine arts may not be as popular as other Asian arts such as Japanese and Chinese, but it doesn't mean that it is any less spectacular.

The arts scene of the indigenous people of the Philippines may not be as popular as the arts of other Asian countries, but it in no means diminishes the variety, originality, and creativity of the Filipinos. They have time and again shown that Filipinos can be with the best of the world when it comes to the arts field. The ambiance of being in islands may have given so many inspiration to at least attempt to capture and recreate the powerful and spectacular forces of nature to the best they can, and also during times of need use it to help them get their basic necessities, not only implying that visual arts is purely for entertainment and decoration, but also for practicality and use. They personify the enduring Filipino spirit of perseverance in face of adversity, of diligence in duty and triumph in failures.

Come and take a look at Filipino indigenous arts, and discover, why “it's more than the usual.”

Indigenous Architecture

Wander over the world heritage site, Banaue Rice Terraces, Eighth Wonder of the World, carved from the high Cordilleras over 2,000 years ago. These Rice Terraces were carved out of the mountains by the native Ifugao people. The Ifugaos made the walls out of hardened mud and clay while they flattened the slopes it could hold water essential for rice growth. It had been the way of life of the Ifugao mountain tribes for the past 2,000 years, kept alive up to this day.
The art of weaving was introduced to the Philippines through trade. It is not possible to state when or where the backstrap loom, which is still in use in some interior remote villages of Ifugao, Bontoc Igorot and Kankanay, was first introduced. This brought the ikat technique of resist-dyeing of the warp thread before weaving, the use of the reel for winding the spun thread and the concept of using textiles in death ceremonies. Weavers were further influenced by imported materials: they imitated the new designs, integrating them with their traditional textiles. Weaver immigrants appear to have brought the ikat technique to the Isinai and Ifugao people of Luzon. Their ikat designs appear on cotton warp in black, once dyed with rice-field mud, later with indigo. One specialty is the production in Kiangan and Dupax, Luzon, of narrow G-strings (tinonwe) used to clothe the dead. The ikat weaving of the western Ifugao does not seem to be very old.

Ifugaos sometimes also incorporate geometric motifs of crosses, triangles and denticulations in panels. The Tinguians manufacture white blankets (inalson) with patterned blue or blue and red warp stripes, or with panels of geometric shapes and motifs of deer, horses, fish and crabs. A feature that is unique to the textiles of the Ifugao, western Bontocs and southern Kalingas is the small band with integral tassels sewn on to the ends of the cloth.
**Indigenous Sculpture**

In the north, the indigenous tradition of sculpture survived the zealous proselytizing of the Roman Catholic Church only among the mountain peoples. The most important type of sculpture, in its quality, quantity and continuing use, are the wooden bulul or bulol carved by Ifugao craftsmen of Mountain Province, Luzon. Often made in pairs, male and female, bulul represent guardian deities and are placed in rice granaries to ensure beautiful rice.

The figures have a religious function that is central in Ifugao life. Carved from wood of the narra tree, the bulul is 300 to 650 mm high. The figure either stands with arms at its sides, hands on stomach and knees often bent, or sits with elbows on knees and hands holding opposite arms. Each statue base is a carved double plinth, possibly referring to the shape of the rice mortar. While some bulul are rough and naively naturalistic, others are carved in smooth stylization with articulated hands and faces. They vary according to the skill of the carvers, who are kinsmen of the patron. Figures similar in appearance to bulul appear in the carved wooden finials of containers, and in the handles of spoons and other Ifugao utensils. While the Ifugao are known for wood-carving, other pre-Hispanic Philippine tribes carved in limestone to create burial jars, their lids often topped by reproductions of human heads (Mindanao); some carved spoons from the chambered Nautilus shell (Palawan); others embossed gold burial face masks of separate nose and eye coverings (Panay).

**Ceramics**

Jars found in burials from the 2nd millennium BC are the earliest-known pottery in the Philippines. A stem dish with a geometric design pierced through the pedestal is a characteristic form. The tradition of unglazed utilitarian earthenware that began in prehistoric times continued until the 9th century AD when production declined as the import of Chinese ceramics increased. There was an extensive ceramic trade between China and the Philippines from the 10th to the 16th century. After that time fewer Chinese wares arrived, and the trade was gradually taken over by the Spanish.

Most of the ceramics have been found in graves, and excavations of these sites have provided a chronology and inventory of the types of Chinese ceramics in the Philippines. A classic Yue form found in the Philippines is a ewer with a head shaped like a phoenix, a greyish glaze and stylized lotus petals on the shoulder. The celadon wares are characterized by a thick green glaze with a greyish or bluish tint and carved decoration. Blue-and-white porcelain dominated imports from the 15th century onwards.
Body adornment

Beads, coins, shells, teeth and metal are all incorporated into Philippine jewelry, which is often used as currency, bride wealth and to mark peace pacts, and is consequently widely distributed. Some jewelry is kept for ceremonial purposes or restricted to noble families. An Ifugao noblewoman from Luzon, for example, wears a head ornament incorporating a brass human figure at her wedding or at funerals.

Beads called kiring are carried by a matchmaker of the Gaddangs, also of Luzon: if a girl accepts the bead, she accepts the marriage. Similar beads are also used for this purpose by the Kalingas of Luzon and the Tambolis of Mindanao. Isneg aristocrats from Luzon wear elaborate mother-of-pearl chest ornaments with incised designs and bead pendants. Hornbill head ornaments may only be worn by Ifugao nobles. Similar headdresses were formerly worn by Ilongot headhunters.

Non-Muslim peoples in Mindanao decorate their colorful and distinctive costumes with glass beads, shells and metal bells and chains. Their jewelry materials include coral and fibers; forms of jewelry include ear-plugs as well as earrings. Old beads are highly prized, especially agate beads among the Kalingas, and Igorot girls are given a head ornament of agate beads before they reach puberty. Ifugao men wear tooth necklaces, believed to impart good luck, and the Ubus wear etched shell amulets to protect them. Necklaces made from roots and bark are worn by the them to ward off sickness.

In Luzon, the Ifugaos and Kalingas adorn the body with tattoos; the Tinguians do not. Tattooing is associated with headhunting and social position. Motifs, including diamonds, crenellations, crosses and zigzags, are similar to those painted on war-shields of the same groups. Bontoc males and females adorn themselves with dull, blue-black arm tattoos. The men also have tattoos on the legs, back and breast. The breast tattoo comprises geometric markings running upwards from each nipple and curving out on the shoulders down to the upper arm.
Philippine Jeepney

the Philippine Jeepney, these one of a kind vehicles came into being as surplus GI jeeps used in WWII were left by American forces in the Philippines, with a little ingenuity and creativity, Filipinos have created the most affordable means of transportation. Every jeepney is unique, having decorated with banners of vibrant colors, to a wealth of brazen embellishments, it has become of work of art on wheels, and king of the Philippine roadways.

Ref: http://www.freewebs.com/philippineindigenousarts/special.html