

Para's pottery:
Functional & decorative



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Pottery in unusual natural colourings, shades that range from pastel yellow to pale pink, that's the specialty of artisan Richenel Para, whose creative work is offered for sale in Readytex.

Modern designs as fruit trays, plates, vases in all shapes and sizes, and incense burners made in the ancient techniques of the first peoples living in this part of the South American rainforest.

Richenel Para (born 1959) is an indigenous Kalinya artisan (better known as Caribs) who learned the traditional craft from helping his mother who made a living of making and selling traditional pottery. Through a course in billboard painting, Para developed his talent for design, but his heart stayed with pottery. Pottery was originally women's work, but since they succeeded in more commercial selling of non-traditional designs in Paramaribo at the end of the 1970s (in galleries and souvenir shops) a few indigenous men started making pottery as well. Para's mother and many after her currently are successful because of the quality of their *prapi's*, jars and little medicine pots with lids, and because these are used in traditional Afro-Surinamese medicine and culture, they are much in demand. This traditional Kalinya pottery and the drinking cups they make for their own cultural purpose are painted with natural red and or black dyes in geometrical patterns in balance with dots on the whole surface or only the upper side and the edge. These traditional decorative patterns are mostly abstract impressions having names that speak for themselves like: soldiers, turtle back, jaguar spots,

snake pattern, ants, flying parrots, indigenous dancers, rows of peccary, tiger or agouti teeth. Indigenous pottery stems from a tradition over 4000 years old...

*The oldest pottery found in Suriname, at *Kaburi* creek, is dated around 2.400 and 1.600 BC. This pottery is characterized by typical appliqué decorations in geometrical patterns. The pottery made today by the Kalinya tribe of Suriname differs completely and has no such decorations. But the currently produced pottery seems to be made in the same, traditional, labor intensive process where by special clay is baked in firewood piles.

The main ingredient is the special grey clay, *alinyo*. This is washed and sieved through a *manari*, braided by the Kalinya. To provide strength to the clay and make it lighter in weight, bark of the couepi tree (*Couepia guianensis*) is added. Deep in the forest the bark is gathered from the couepi tree and is charred. The couepi charcoal is then ground with pestle and mortar, sieved through a *manari* and mixed with the clay. After a pot, tray or jar is formed by hand, the pottery is given color by means of natural dyes obtained from clays and sometimes parts of plants. Then the surface is polished with a *Marowini* topu, a smooth stone said to be found only in the *Marowijne* River in Suriname. A fire is lit and after sufficient and gradual preheating the pot (s) on all sides, the blazing firewood is spread in a circle and the clay objects are placed within the circle of fire. Subsequently,

more firewood is piled around the pottery forming of a pyramid, and the fire is closed with metal oil-barrel tops. After several hours of firing, and sometimes reshuffling the fire wood to burn evenly, the pottery is finished. Richenel Para can make any kind of pottery on request. "Making pottery is work like any other", he says. But the art, fun and love that lightens his labor come from the designs and decorations he can call his own. He enjoys the fact that the demands for his creative pottery is growing. Seeing some of his children helping him and having the same pleasure in spontaneous creation of pottery, he has all faith for the future of this ancient craft as a small step towards sustainable development of the Suriname rainforest.

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