



Fig. 5. Cuna *mola* blouse, collected 1920s. Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (A.2161.30-45). Photograph by Richard Meier.

The appliqués are decorated with designs probably derived from those used in body painting (Salvador 1978: 12; Helms 1981: 71). The motifs may also be associated with men's oratory which gradually reveals secret meanings through layers of hidden knowledge (Hirschfeld 1977: 147-66). Although the designs on the *mola* appliqué panels are infinitely variable, the structure of the Cuna outfit itself is relatively unchanging. The costume consists of a skirt and scarf cut from rectangular cloth, a blouse with two *mola* appliqué panels (one in front and one in back) sewn together with a yoke at the top and puffed sleeves; the scarf is always red and yellow, while the skirt is usually dark blue with green or yellow (Salvador 1976: 172).

*Mola*-making is a specialized women's craft consisting of two different appliqué techniques whereby a multi-colored design is created from several pieces of commercially-made cloth which have been stacked one above the other. Some designs are formed by placing smaller pieces of fabric on top of larger ones in such a way that a portion of the underlying fabric appears along the edges of the superimposed piece. Other designs are created through a much more unique and unusual process known as "reverse" appliqué (Fig. 6). This technique consists of cutting open outer cloth layers along the lines of the desired design to reveal the various colors of underlying fabric,