



# **The Curse of Nemur: In Search of the Art, Myth and Ritual of the Ishir (Pitt Illuminations)**

*Ticio Escobar*

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The Tomárahó, a subgroup of the Ishir (Chamacoco) of Paraguay, are one of the few remaining indigenous populations who have managed to keep both their language and spiritual beliefs intact. They have lived for many years in a remote region of the Gran Chaco, having limited contact with European or Latin American cultures. The survival of the Tomárahó has been tenuous at best; at the time of this writing there were only eighty-seven surviving members.

Ticio Escobar, who lived extensively among the Tomárahó, draws on his acquired knowledge of Ishir beliefs to confront them with his own Western ideology, and records a unique dialogue between cultures that counters traditional anthropological interpretation. *The Curse of Nemur*--which is part field diary, part art critique, and part cultural anthropology—offers us a view of the world from an entirely new perspective, that of the Ishir. We acquire deep insights into their powerful and enigmatic narrative myths, which find expression in the forms of body painting, feather decoration, dream songs, shamanism, and ritual.

Through dramatic photographs, native drawings, extensive examination of color and its importance in Ishir art, and Escobar's lucid observation, *The Curse of Nemur* illuminates the seamless connection of religious practice and art in Ishir culture. It offers a glimpse of an aesthetic "other," and in so doing, causes us to reexamine Western perspectives on the interpretation of art, belief, and Native American culture.

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