



# FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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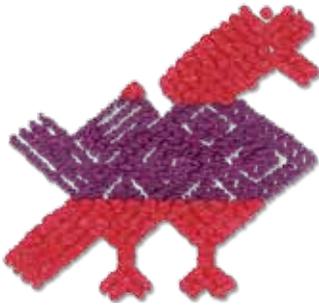
Yolanda Alcorta

## EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF MAYA WEAVERS...

We are delighted to report on the progress of two FOIM initiatives which focus on the preservation of weaving skills. One is an ambitious project by the Museo Ixchel which is based on teaching elementary school children how to weave on the backstrap loom...with the long-range goal of inclusion in the national curriculum. The other is the progress of “Weaving for the Future”, a weaving cooperative managed by Yolanda Alcorta.



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# IN THE MUSEUM

The Museo Ixchel is located on 6a Calle final, zona 10, on the grounds of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala City.

The museum is open from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday, and from 9 am to 1 pm on Saturday. Admission is Q35 for adults, Q15 for students and Q8 for schoolchildren.

For further information on library access and holiday closings and more, please visit [museoixchel.org](http://museoixchel.org) or telephone 502 2331 3622

⚙ Your Museum's Education Department has been very active with community outreach. Once a month, the Museum offers a child-friendly activity called *The Story of a Thread* in which children and their parents participate in different hands-on activities with threads, textiles and other materials. Kids use their imagination to create magical results. Another monthly activity is held at a popular local bookshop in the evening, teaching people how to embroider different stitches. Participants are enthusiastic and each month there are more attendees.

⚙ February saw a very special event, an exhibition of paintings by Carmen L. Pettersen. The event was co-hosted by the Fundación Carmen L. Pettersen. Pettersen was one of the Museum's founders and is the author of the collection of watercolor paintings depicting traditional Mayan Indian dress hung in the Museum's collection. The temporary exhibition presented Pettersen's watercolors created between 1930 and 1984, depicting in verdant and lavish detail the scenery of Guatemala's Bocacosta (the piedmont lands sloping from the volcanic highlands towards the Pacific

Coastal plain). Her works illustrate daily activities on coffee farms, the clearing of land for new plantations, and breathtaking landscapes and studies of trees. The Museum was packed on inauguration night. The Fundación Carmen L. Pettersen also held two free workshops, one on Landscaping, Gardens and Land Art and another on Pettersen's artistic landscapes. Both workshops drew overflow crowds of about 100 participants including art students from universities and art schools.

⚙ In March, on a beautiful dry season day, the Museum celebrated its traditional and most popular fundraiser, a picnic at Finca El Zapote, the Pettersen's botanical garden and quinine plantation. It is almost impossible to describe the beauty of that farm to someone who has never seen it. About 400 visitors, among them many foreigners, enjoyed the gardens with Volcano Fuego looming overhead. The word "idyllic" was used by many awed at the majesty of the place where Pettersen produced the watercolors exhibited at the Ixchel.

⚙ In May the Museum celebrated International Museum Day with free admission and many activities. Scores of excited schoolchildren learned about their Mayan textile heritage and got to try their hand at embroidery and weaving. May also saw a spectacular event, the BAM Equinox, an exhibit of Latin American contemporary art sponsored by BAM, one of Guatemala's large banks.



**Cover Top:** Florinda López demonstrating (Washington DC)

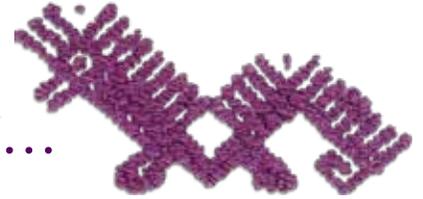
**Cover Bottom:** Children learning traditional skills in the classroom (Comalapa)

**Left:** "Cowboys" watercolor by Carmen L. Pettersen

**Right Top:** Hellen Ascoli interviewing weaver (Comalapa)

**Right Bottom:** Florinda teaching Jenny Juárez (Washington DC)

# EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION... ...IN COMALAPA



Development of a teacher training manual is being done by a team of three: Eluvia Toledo (sensory therapist and psychologist), Negma Coy (poet and teacher from Comalapa), and leader Hellen Ascoli (artist, educator, and Director of the Education Department at the Museum.) A pilot program is underway in Comalapa, and an observation phase has been completed to better understand how weaving happens. The focus was not on actual weaving, but on the physical, developmental and social steps that lead to weaving, both at home and at school.

## ...IN WASHINGTON DC

Long interested in preserving Mayan weaving skills, Yolanda was determined to enable something self-sustaining—a cooperative in the US that would let indigenous weavers generate income from the art form they love and is uniquely theirs.\*

This past year has seen both events and the establishment of some baseline business capabilities. Because the backstrap weavers are such an attraction, they can participate in a wide range of activities—from local community fiestas to museum exhibit support. In the last half of 2016 alone, they participated in such diverse Washington DC area events as:

- GuateFest with a *desfile de trajes* and a FOIM publications table
- Smithsonian Maya Heritage and Culture Program, with a FOIM Collection exhibit, weaving demonstration, and co-op textile sales
- OkuPlaza Fest in the Adams Morgan traditional Latino neighborhood, with a FOIM sales table and weaving demonstration
- National Museum of American Indian (NMAI) Native Art Market, with co-op textile sales
- TamalFest, with a demonstration and FOIM publications table

Findings will serve to shape the exercises, activities, and docent reading covered in the pedagogical manual.

Hellen reports:

### **Children in relationship to play and movement**

The recess areas, although impoverished, have trees, bricks, tires and a ladder which easily transform into a playground which stimulates the balance and proprioception needed for weaving. One teacher had turned a ladder into a balancing game. Bricks were moved around the yard as a “base” for play – this moving of weight provides proprioception. We observed various resources for potential play and things at hand useful for suggested activities.

### **Children in relationship to weaving and fine motor skills**

The cultural preparation for weaving is as important as the physical preparation. We were happy to find that there were classes in Kaqchikel, where words that surround the weaving tradition were being taught. One class

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Yolanda Alcorta

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## ...IN COMALAPA CONTINUED

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had different *huipiles* hung in the classroom, and a more advanced class had a final project – embroidery for girls and knitting for boys.

#### Weavers, techniques and narratives

We visited weavers' homes to understand who had taught them to weave and how they had learned. Many stories were similar. Most women started to weave at ages 6-8, but also confessed to an earlier interest, e.g., watching someone in the house weave, playing "pretend" with the thread, or trying to warp it in play. We also realized that weaving is not taught sequentially. Rather, the mother initially helps the daughter weave on an already set-up loom – and later they go back to learn the process of setting it up. This insight is very valuable for our teaching guides.

The Comalapa Observation phase culminated in an outline for the pedagogical manual, which will now be fleshed out and tested.

[for a longer version of this article, please request it at FOIMinfo@gmail.com]

## ...IN WASHINGTON DC CONTINUED

From an infrastructure perspective, the co-op continues to test and evaluate various venues, to build ergonomic weaving benches, and now has the ability to make credit card sales.

The co-op is proving to have multiple benefits. The demonstrations have served as an invaluable education asset by showing weaving "in the flesh". It is also well on its way to providing ancillary income for the weavers themselves. And there has been the additional benefit of handing down weaving skills and traditions to the next generation. The element of pride in wearing traditional dress is growing, as women come to important events like quinceañeras in *trajes* they have woven or had sent from Guatemala to ensure the latest fashion. The FOIM are pleased to support a project with such a multi-faceted stream of benefits. Check our website at [www.ixchelfriends.org](http://www.ixchelfriends.org) for the timing and location of events which will feature Weaving for the Future.

\* [see our November 2015 bulletin for details on Weaving for the Future's inception.]



Please visit [ixchelfriends.org](http://ixchelfriends.org)



## FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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