



# FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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## THE MUSEO IXCHEL 2016 CALENDAR

– SYNCRETISM AND BELIEFS

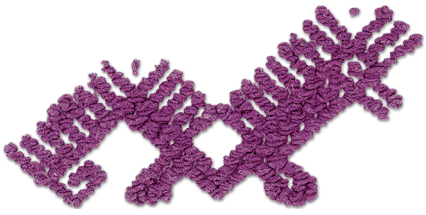
January - Santiago Sacatepéquez-2015

Photo by Armando Mazariegos,  
Sub-Director, Museo Ixchel Fototeca

The photographs in the 2016 Museo Ixchel calendar are over-the-top- gorgeous! Titled *Syncretism and Beliefs*, this is a work of art in twelve months. A sequence of beauty based on the theme of uniting different religions, cultures and beliefs, the images are moving and beautiful with an added punch of photographer Armando Mazariegos' technique of spot color against a background of black and white. The effect is eye-popping and at the same time illustrates the then and the now, the past and the present. It is a fabulous photographic collection as well as testament to tradition and continuity.

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## NEW CURATOR VIOLETA GUTIÉRREZ

Violeta Juana Gutiérrez Caxaj, Curator  
for the Museo Ixchel.

Photo by Armando Mazariegos,  
Sub-Director, Museo Ixchel Fototeca

**Violeta Juana Gutiérrez Caxaj** grew up in San Juan Argueta, Sololá, speaking K'iché at home. She was one of five children and the only girl. Her father always told her, “You have to prepare yourself. You have to do something.”

“He was very liberal for his time!” she laughs.

Violeta went to primary school in San Juan Argueta and then her father sent her to a boarding school for indigenous girls in Antigua. She studied there for six years and earned her teaching degree.

“It was there that I saw and grew to appreciate the variety of traditional costumes that the girls wore. For special cultural events, they wore their ceremonial clothes. I think that was where it all began.”

From school, Violeta went to the University of San Carlos to study social work and there became friends with Soledad Icó. Soledad worked at the Ixchel Museum as Registrar, and when she had to do her EPS for 6 months as part of her university work, she asked Violeta to take her place in the museum.

“It was not difficult to like and understand the importance of the museum, after being in school in Antigua,” Violeta says, “but *doña* Rosario was

very strict with me.”

It was Violeta’s good fortune that Rosario Miralbés de Polanco, Curator of the Collection, was writing a book on *cuyuscate* (natural brown cotton). Rosario asked Violeta to pull out every textile that had *cuyuscate* in it—even one thread!. “So I got to know the collection in those six months.”

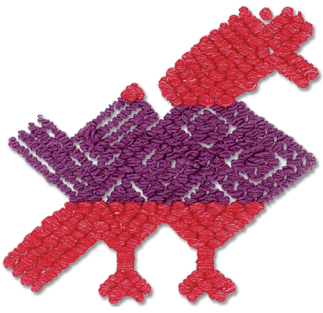
When Soledad returned, Rosario offered Violeta the position of guide to the exhibits but, as the new museum had just opened and there was only one exhibit, she helped in many other ways: she worked with the children’s programs, with rental costumes, but most important, as Barbara Knoke de Arathoon’s assistant. Barbara is an anthropologist and took her on museum research field trips. Violeta learned to plan and organize the research. During those years she also helped Rosario mount more exhibits in the permanent galleries.

In 1996 Violeta married and now she is the mother of two daughters.

She went to work for Los Hermanos La Salle in PRODESA, a rural educational project in Santiago but, although she learned public speaking and to give powerpoint presentations, she found that she missed the work at the museum. She returned in 2000. Soledad had begun to work with the weavers of ProTeje, the museum’s natural weaving project, and so Violeta was asked on her return to be Registrar of the collection.

While at PRODESA she began what would become three years of a Saturday morning TV program on Canal 7—“The Rich Tradition of Maya Textiles of Guatemala.” She would leave home at 5am wearing a costume she had chosen, prepared to speak about it for 15 minutes. It was a help that in 1998 Violeta had learned to drive a car, “I was even more independent.”

Violeta had many extraordinary teachers: Rosario de Polanco, Barbara de Arathoon and then, in 2002, she was fortunate to work with Kennis Kim, a Canadian conservation chemist who had her masters in Art Conservation and Museum Studies. Kennis wrote an application for a Getty grant which the Ixchel Museum won. And Kennis devoted herself to teaching Violeta what she knew about art conservation.



## 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

LEFT: Santiago, Sacatepéquez-2013

CENTER: Comalapa, Chimaltenango-2015

RIGHT: Comalapa, Chimaltenango-2015

Photos by Armando Mazariegos

✦ Curator Emeritus, Rosario Miralbés de Polanco, was awarded the highest honor of the Ixchel Museum—The Rupan Plato sash. Rosario has worked with the museum for 32 years, researching, conserving and storing the collection. She oversaw the building of the new collection room and has written a program specifically for the museum collection. She has curated exhibits abroad, authored monographs and written successful grant proposals. The museum is proud to honor her.

✦ To gather information on the *cofradías* of various towns, the museum team of curator, Violeta Gutiérrez, anthropologist Lucía Jiménez, and photographer Armando Mazariegos, has made three field trips, all funded by Friends of the Ixchel Museum.

In early June they went to San Juan Comalapa to see the preparations for the festival and speak with the *cofrades* the first day and then to watch the *cofradía* procession and mass on the feast day of San Juan. In July they went to Patzizía and pending is a trip to San Martín.

✦ Maya Fledderjohn, Ixchel Museum President, was interviewed by Pilar Pérez for her show “*Con Mucho Gusto*” on Guatevisión. Maya explained the work of the the Ixchel Museum and its importance.

✦ Los Malacates: *Entre hilos y fibras*. A conference was given by archeologist Margarita Cossich Vielman with a demonstration of the use of malacates to spin thread by Toribia Morales of San Miguel Chicaj.

✦ Fundraising Events: The museum gave a summer luncheon showing *cofradía* headdresses, and the Garden Club created floral headdresses to match. It was a beautiful morning at Club Nara.

“Trova and Jazz” was a successful evening of live music and wine with the works of Alvaro Sánchez on view.

An embroidery workshop was offered by American artist Anna Lee Levin for three days in August.



# ENABLING THE MAYAN TEXTILE TRADITION – IN WASHINGTON?

Angélica López (weaving), Olandina Hernández (holding a loom), Floralinda López and Jenny Juárez, all co-op members, as they begin a presentation at GuateFest, Arlington, VA.

**For the past year, Board member Yolanda Alcorta has been sowing the seeds of a women’s weaving cooperative in the Washington, DC area. At present, there are six active weavers, all from Concepción Chiquirichapa, in the emerging “Weaving for the Future”.**

**How did the co-op idea originate?** 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 loved and was uniquely theirs. “I wanted the weavers themselves to form it – to develop something based on what would be productive and helpful to them as indigenous women in this country.”

**What has this approach meant?** “It’s a lot slower to build. To start with, these women aren’t used to a co-op environment, other than within their families. Then, while a lot of external aid goes to forming co-ops in Guatemala, there is nothing done HERE in the US. There are no local avenues

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

to take advantage of their skills, nor the available time to teach the next generation back-strap loom weaving.” Logistics are also a challenge, as potential co-op members are geographically separated across Virginia, Washington, and Maryland.

**Why do this now?** Yolanda believes the timing is right because there is greater financial security, and thus a greater ability to focus on cultural aspects. “Many have been here 10-15 years, so they’re no longer only in survival mode – they have jobs, they have children, they are creating a future for their families. Like the early Italians and Lithuanians, they are starting their own cultural groups – several have founded a family folk dance group which includes their children. A weaving co-op can give the women an income stream combined with doing something both artistic and cultural.”

She points out the growing element of pride – jeans may be worn daily to work, but many women come to important events like *quinceañeras* in *trajes* they have woven or had sent from Guatemala to ensure the latest fashion.

**What stage is the co-op in?** Basically, it is still in Stage One. The core group is 6 women (plus one son who braids bracelets). But progress is slow due to demands of work and family. The women meet ad hoc and have participated in several events, e.g. the National Museum of the American

Indian (NMAI) Native Art Market and the Saturday markets at the Arts Walk in Brookland. “We also have an opportunity to do a small pop-up for three months. A firm schedule means we can have a weaver demonstrating, which generates excitement and helps sales. We need to find the most productive sites, so testing different venues and products is important.”

At the moment, Friends is the only source of external funding, and we are seeking to provide more. Our seed money has let the weavers experience sales at the NMAI Art Market, will go to building warping boards and ergonomic benches, and also will be used for common sourcing of threads (currently shipped from Guatemala individually) and site rentals.

Supporting this kind of initiative is important both macro and micro. Despite questions about whether hand weaving can (or should) find a place in the 21st Century, there is worldwide support by governments and cultural organizations for continuing “traditional crafts”. But it’s also about making it easier for immigrants to be proud of their heritage. Yolanda concludes: “Our Mayan heritage is something to be proud of. It’s



important to know your roots, and this is part of that. You learn your dances, you learn about weaving, you learn about what your forefathers did. It’s important not to feel ashamed of who you are. And to be able to say: You have your culture – I have mine, too.” The co-op members are in a great position to highlight this as they are “Weaving for the Future”.

Naomi, Alex and Angélica López sharing (and selling) their art with fellow artists and the public at the Brookland ARTS WALK in Washington, DC.



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## YOU NEVER KNOW WHO KNOWS YOU...

Friends of the Ixchel Museum was both surprised and delighted to receive a textile donation from Joan E. Henriksen. She was not even on our Newsletter mailing list! Joan was an archeology volunteer in Guatemala several decades ago -- and had subsequently collected several textiles, as well as ancillary pieces such as tumplines (*mecapales*), rope harnesses which men use to carry heavy burdens such as firewood. She was downsizing, found us online, and offered her textiles because she wanted them to go where they would be appreciated and hopefully seen in exhibits. We were pleased to receive them and they will enter our collection this fall.

**Charitable bequests can reduce your taxes and support work you find worthy.** Please remember Friends of the Ixchel Museum in your will or living trust. If you would like information specific to naming us as a designated non-profit in your estate, do let us know.

## NEW CURATOR

Continued from page 5

In 2010, Violeta won a grant to go to Spain for two months to curate the Guatemalan textile collection of the Museo de América in Madrid. In 2013 she curated a traveling exhibit that the Ixchel Museum sent to Chile. She chose and packed the pieces, got the permits, and set up the exhibit at the Museo de la Moneda in Santiago.

For a few years, Violeta worked in the mornings at the Ixchel Museum and in the afternoons at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología. "I ate lunch in the car!" she laughs. There she registered and catalogued their textile collection. She also worked with various private textile collections when asked. For the Popol Vuh museum she worked on their collection of dance costumes.

"Violeta learns quickly," says Rosario, "because she is curious and very confident in her ability. She is a very smart person, funny and happy, and a very positive woman."

"I have pushed her to work hard, to learn to write, to learn more about the techniques. I want her to be responsible, tenacious and forward looking. I know she will keep learning because she likes it."

Rosario, now Curator Emeritus, is very proud of Violeta. "Violeta is going to be a very important person among scholars here—in a short time!"



## FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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**Members receive free entrance to exhibitions of FOIM in the U.S. and to the Museo Ixchel in Guatemala City and discounts on purchases in the Museum Shop.**

Benefactor	\$1,000	Contributor	\$100
Patron	\$500	Family	\$50
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