



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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TAKING CARE OF TEXTILES

"Scholars around the world will be able to study even the most fragile pieces without damaging them, thanks to careful work at the museum and welcome funding from the Carène Foundation."

Above: Rosario Miralbes de Polanco examines one of the su'ts in the Ixchel's collection

The Fondation Carène of Switzerland, dedicated to education and cultural heritage, has given the Ixchel Museum a generous grant to conserve the museum's collection of Maya su't. Su't are square or rectangular woven cloths worn as head cloths or folded over the shoulder. The most ornamented and beautiful su't are used in religious ceremonies, worn by the cofrades, the important men and women of the cofradias, or religious confraternities, during the processions honoring their patron saint. Smaller su't may be used to wrap ceremonial candles, monstrances, a cross, or used as altar cloths.

The Ixchel Museum, with a collection of over 6,000 woven pieces of Maya clothing from more than 115 weaving villages, has done much work in the conservation and storage of its huipil and faja collections but there is still important work to be done conserving the su't.

"A collection is useless if the pieces are not assessed and recorded," says Curator Emeritus Rosario Miralbes de Polanco, an expert on textiles, fibers and dyes and a former Fulbright Scholar who will lead the project. "The textiles cannot be exhibited if there is no data on them or they can not be easily found."

The su't project is a painstaking process. An initial assessment of the conservation status of each piece must be made. The pieces will be stretched out on a worktable padded with muslin, to be measured and identified as to materials and approximate age.

Technical analysis with a microscope reveals how the threads have been spun, as well as the dyes and weaving techniques used in the textile. Pieces will be studied for irregularities, broken threads or stains. Technicians wearing cotton gloves will also search for pulled threads or holes and traces of fungus, mold or bacteria. If it needs restoration it will be marked and looked at later. Should they have traces of bacteria or fungus, they will be put in a freezer for two weeks, wrapped in muslin and plastic.

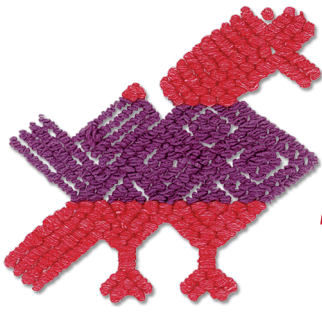
Tags, written with pencil on white cotton ribbons, will be sewn at the corner of each piece. The stitches must be overhand and there must be no knots which would pull or put stress on the fabric.

Photographs of each piece, back and front, will be taken. Specific areas of the textile will be photographed as decided. Color photographs of both sides of the piece will be put into an album, and black and white photographs, more stable and lasting, will be put on the sides of the storage boxes to identify easily the pieces inside. The photographs and information will be entered into the museum's digital program of three screens.

The su't stored in boxes will be folded with crumpled acid-free paper so the folds are gentle and do not break the fibers. The pieces will then be wrapped in acid-free paper and stored in acid-free boxes, only 10 to a box so the weight on the lower su't will not be heavy. Bigger pieces be rolled in acid-free paper and then in acid-free muslin and placed on horizontal hanging tubes.

The significance of this conservation, assessment and storage project cannot be exaggerated.

Continued inside



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 or telephone 502 2331 3622

✦ Renovation of the museum's permanent galleries has begun, funded by Friends of the Ixchel Museum. Beautiful collection pieces have been chosen to replace the present objects on view, and lighting has been installed to spotlight the new map showing the huipiles and weaving villages of Guatemala. The renovated galleries are expected to open in July.

✦ The museum bestowed its highest honor, the Ruban Plato, to Thelma Willemsen for her hard work and lifetime devotion to the Ixchel. Thelma founded the Pro-Teje weaving project, which currently supports 185 Maya women. The award is a handwoven scarf with the design of the ceremonial ruban plato from Comalapa; it was presented at the luncheon given for its weavers on International Women's Day (photo top and bottom left).

✦ The 2012 Ixchel Museum calendar will feature the oils of Andres Curruchich, a naïf artist from Comalapa, who painted scenes

of village life in the 1940s. Forty-one of his works, donated to the Ixchel by the Stahl family, will be featured at an exhibit opening in September (photo bottom right).

✦ Kathy Rouso gave a talk on maguey fiber at the museum, based on her new book, *Maguey Journey: Discovering Textiles in Guatemala*.

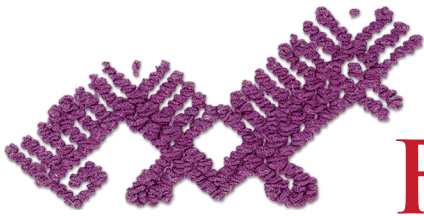
✦ At the annual meeting of FOIM, Anne Girard de Marroquin was honored her years of work for the photo archive, both in the field as a photographer and in the museum as an archivist.

Her replacement is María Fernanda Garcia, who is responsible for most of the photos in this bulletin. Another new appointment is María Cecilia Diaz as Director of Communications.

✦ The museum's largest fund-raiser, a Sunday picnic, took place March 6, in the magnificent gardens of El Zapote, home of the Pettersen family.

✦ Designer Priscilla Bianchi's contemporary quilts, exhibited at the museum last year, are featured on a new set of Guatemalan stamps.

✦ Barbara Arathoon, the museum's associate anthropologist, and Nancy Tunche, assistant to Pro-Teje, gave a workshop and talk on Maya dress to an enthusiastic audience at the Savannah College of Art and Design in April.



FRIENDS IN THE USA



Although the Friends of the Ixchel Museum is a constant support for the Ixchel Museum itself, its mandate also requires that the organization support cultural and educational projects in the United States that spotlight Guatemalan textiles and traditions.

tion so that people can dress up in traditional traje. Whole families delight in photographing each other in authentic clothing from their home country.

“Many of them have come here with nothing, so it’s wonderful for them to try on authentic clothing,” she says.

Yolanda, with the help of fellow board member Ana-Maria Zaugg, also creates a FOIM booth of Guatemalan textiles, clothing, crafts and publications for Maya Weekend, an annual event put on by the University of Pennsylvania’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. She’s proud that enthusiasts for indigenous textiles come to the event every year to add to their collections.

Additional recent activities have included events at the Museum of the American Indian in New York and a fashion show of traje at the Queens Museum. She also has done a number of workshops and school programs on Guatemalan textiles and culture.

She is looking forward to next year’s Maya weekend, which marks the end of the Mayan calendar and will coincide with a new exhibit entitled *Maya 2012 : The Lords of Time*. It’s also the thirtieth anniversary of the museum, so it’s expected to be a major event for enthusiasts of the Maya world.



Board member Yolanda Acorta is the principal mover and shaker behind FOIM’s involvement with a variety of such events. Yolanda, the US-born daughter of Guatemalans, has devoted much of her professional and volunteer life to reminding expatriate Guatemalans of their rich heritage and exposing others to these traditions.

One of the largest and most festive celebrations is the Gran Día Chapín (Chapín is a popular term for Guatemalans), held annually in the Washington, D.C., area, which boasts some 60,000 Guatemalans. The event began eight years ago as a picnic for 300 people and has mushroomed to a day-long event of music, food and other traditions, attracting 8000 people. Yolanda is responsible for a booth that sells Guatemalan crafts and some of the Ixchel Museum’s most popular publications. She also brings pieces from her own collec-

Yolanda Acorta, top, presided over FOIM’s table at Maya Weekend at the University of Pennsylvania; A Guatemalan woman at the Día Chapín enjoyed dressing herself and her daughter in traditional traje

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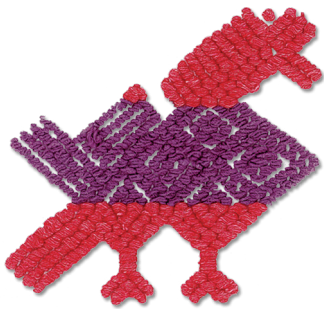
Many su’t are extremely old and delicate and irreplaceable. They are being damaged by the breakage of their fibers that occurs when they are folded without tissue paper padding, when they are piled under more weight than is good for them, and when they are moved. They may become contaminated by handling.

Presently, whenever anyone looks for a su’t, the others must be moved in the search. For the recent exhibit of su’t, all the su’t were lifted and moved and touched and wrinkled by the effort to find the best pieces for the

exhibit. If a scholar wants to see and study a particular su’t, all the objects must be moved to find a particular piece.

In the future, only one box need be opened or one roll unwrapped to find a su’t. When the su’t are documented, photographed and the information digitized, scholars around the world will be able to study even the most fragile pieces without damaging them, thanks to careful work at the museum and welcome funding from the Carène Foundation.





FOUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

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Cathrine Denton is the great-granddaughter of Carmen Lind Pettersen and remembers watching Mrs. Pettersen painting her watercolors of Maya people and their dress. She grew up in Guatemala, where her family gave her an appreciation of the country's history, art and culture. She is a pharmacology research fellow at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where she lives with her husband Levi.

Margot Blum Schevill is a museum anthropologist who has been working with Maya textiles since 1978. She studied backstrap weaving in San Antonio AGuas Calientes. She has curated many exhibitions and has written numerous articles about weavers and textiles of Guatemala. She is an independent textile consultant and lives in Berkeley, California.

Through the years **Ana Smith** has worked with visitors to Guatemala by setting up varied programs throughout the country with exposure to the many cultural and natural experiences this country has to offer to a varied clientele. Ana has also been a part of film and documentary production for many different media when the location is Guatemala.

Anabella Schloesser de Paiz has had a decades-long involvement with the Ixchel Museums. For many years she has been a member of the Ixchel's Guatemalan board of directors, known as the Asociación. She has written several books, including a novel about Guatemala's civil war and a monograph on the country's carved slingshots.



In the last FOIM bulletin, the obituary for Sylvia Leonowens was accompanied by a picture of her mother, due to an editing error. The correct photograph of Mrs. Leonowens appears above.

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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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