

Exhibition: Hecho a Mano. Traditional Handcrafts of Mexico

HECHO A MANO: Traditional Handcrafts of Mexico

August 18th
to September 29th, 2012

A compelling exhibition of traditional handcrafts of Mexico features a carefully chosen selection of glass, textiles, ceramics, woodwork, metal, and worked leather handcrafts dating from Pre-Columbian to contemporary times. Special to the exhibition are copies of ancient codices from Madrid and traditional costumes.

Mexican handcrafts are rooted in the use of every day materials, and historically designs came out of the basic need to make beautiful and well-crafted pieces out of utilitarian ware. Traditionally, handcrafts were made by people who had no formal art training. Then, and to this day, items were made by hand, employing simple tools and materials that were readily available. Variance occurs due to the cultural, spiritual, social and physical differences of each region.

In an effort to further connect the global with the local, the Museum has chosen to focus a portion of this exhibition on the lives and experiences of Mexican migrant labourers working in Lake Country. Consistent with the theme of this exhibition, the photography exposition is entitled ***Hired Hands: Mexican Migrant Labourers in Lake Country***, which features portraits and stories of Mexican migrant workers in our community. These photographs came from interviews with eight Mexican migrant workers employed on Coral Beach Farms in Carr's Landing, Lake Country.







The Lake Country Museum is pleased to present

HECHO A MANO:

Traditional Handcrafts of Mexico

**August 18th to
September 29th**



Summer hours:

Open every day through
September 2nd, 10am to 4pm.

Fall hours:

Mondays, Wednesdays &
Saturdays from 1pm to 4pm.

Admission by donation.



Lake Country Museum

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With thanks to

The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Coral Beach Farms

Elise Hahn Photography

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Rocillo

Randy Nagel

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And to the Mexican Community of Lake Country

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Traditional Handcrafts of Mexico



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Lake Country, BC V4V 2J7

www.lakecountrymuseum.com

Hecho a Mano: Traditional Handcrafts of Mexico is the inspiration of Lake Country Museum Curator Dan Bruce.

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Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Wall Tapestry

Textiles in Mexico center chiefly on the creation of tapestries and hangings needed for religious purposes. Vast quantities of textiles were offered to the gods; traditional hangings were needed for the inner chambers of temples, and draperies displayed during religious processions.

The woven wool wall hanging is an example of a product that borrows heavily from ancient weaving techniques and has been adapted for the tourist market. This piece was created by the Mixtec people and purchased in the state of Oaxaca.



Photos by Elise Hahn Photography

¡Muchas gracias a todos los que contribuyeron a este proyecto!

All photographs are for sale. Proceeds will go towards the Lake Country Museum and its work with the local Mexican community. Please inquire with the museum staff for a price list.

Hired Hands: Mexican Migrant Labourers in Lake Country

This exposition features photographs and clips from interviews with eight Mexican migrant workers employed on Coral Beach Farms in Carr's Landing, Lake Country.

The purpose of this portion of the exhibition is to highlight the Mexican community living and working in Lake Country.



Dance of the Toro de Petate, Huixtepec, Oaxaca

Most of the dances are part of festivals where artists imaginatively recreate myths and realities of Mexican lifestyles. These dances allow cultural groups to clarify and articulate their history through embodied expression by “becoming” – through either masked impersonation or crafted improvisation – a living representation of their past. Each mask is worn together with a complete costume to depict the identity of each dance character. The mask presented belongs to the “Dance of the Toro de Petate” or the Dance of the Bull. It is an occasion that infuses both religious and traditional practices.



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Women's Tunic

The women of *Yalálag* are easily recognized when dressed in their traditional attire—a white tunic (*huipil*) and a wrap-around skirt. The *huipil* is adorned with colored tassels in front and back and embroidered with a floral design. On such occasions a black wool head-dress may also be worn. The traditional costume also includes, as a pendant on a necklace, the triple cross (*Krus yonn*)—sometimes known as the *Yalálag* cross.



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Woven Basket

The Mixtec were one of the great Mesoamerican civilizations (800-1500 AD), renowned for their historiography, their gold work, their stonework, their polychrome pottery and their basketry. Today the Mixtecs live primarily in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla.

This basket, known generically as *tenate* in Spanish, can be found in all sizes. While baskets woven of palm can still be found, those most frequently seen are made of colorful synthetic materials. The synthetics are durable, unlike palm, require no special care, and are available to basket weavers all year round.



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Traditional Dress

Upon visiting Oaxaca City, one will quickly notice the Mixtec women. In isolated regions the garments worn by many Mixtec women represent the greatest continuity with adherence to pre-Hispanic garment styles. Their dress consists of a wrap-around skirt, held in place by a waist-sash. This particular piece is seamed to form a tube. Each morning, the wearer arranges the skirt anew, creating a series of voluminous folds or tight pleats.

Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum



Wax-beaded decorative bowl

In order to win the protection of their many deities, the Huichol people express their faith by offering food and votive objects during religious ceremonies which denote a concrete form of their desires.

This particular votive is known as a *Rukuri*, a half-gourd lined with beeswax. Glass beads are crucial in the expression of the Huichol people. Picked up one by one on the



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

point of a needle or thorn, the tiny beads are dexterously pressed down into the wax to form brightly coloured pictures featuring suns, birds, animals, and flowers.

Further Readings

Kathleen Berrin, et al., *Art of the Huichol Indians* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1978).

Elizabeth Carmichael & Chloë Sayer, *The Skeleton at the Feast* (London: British Museum Press, 1991).

David Carrasco & Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *Moctezuma's Mexico* (Niwot, University Press of Colorado, 1992).

Nelson H. Graburn, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

Chloë Sayer, *Mexican Tiles* (London: British Museum Press, 1985).

Linda Schele & David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of The Ancient Maya* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990).

Lois Waterspring, *Oaxacan Ceramics: Traditional Folk Art by Oaxacan Women* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000).

Machete

The machete was developed for clearing land and for agricultural purposes and may take vary in size from twelve inches (*machete cañero*) to almost a yard, though most field machetes (*machete de monte*) range from 18 to 26 inches. The machete and knife were crafted in the city of Ocotlan, near Oaxaca City.

Each handle is made from cow horn, the machete is fashioned to resemble a horse head decoration, while the knife symbolizes an eagle. Prior to the 1820s, the use of steel was uncommon and difficult to create on a mass scale. It then became cheap enough to make cutlery, edged tools, and striking tools completely of steel.

Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum



Hopi Pot, contemporary

The resurgence of Hopi pottery can be traced to Sikyatki, a prehistoric Hopi village located near First Mesa. This village was abandoned well before Spanish contact in the mid-16th century. The ruins were excavated in 1890 with the aid of Hopi workman, among whom was the husband of Nampeyo. So great was the influence of the Sikyatki designs on Nampeyo, and so great was the influence of Nampeyo on other Hopi potters, that contemporary Hopi pottery appears as a continuation of Sikyatki form and design, the 500 year hiatus notwithstanding.



*Lake Country Museum
Randy Nagel and Shirley
Galenkamp collection*

Plate, white decorative

The Jimenez family utilizes only four different patterns when creating tableware- three of which are based on geometric Mixtec and Zapotec designs. The fourth, called *La Pluma*, is unique from the other three, favouring leaves or plumes. This separate design was pioneered by Rafael Jimenez, who has since passed away. An ivory glaze was applied over the red clay and the designs were etched into the glaze, creating grooves and spaces through which the terra cotta color would later appear. Since his death, the Jimenez family has ceased any further production of the *La Pluma* design.



*Courtesy of The Okanagan
Heritage Museum*

Black Pottery, contemporary

Dona Rosa de Nieto, of San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico, discovered a technique for making decorative black pottery from local clay. The burnished effect is created by a short firing time in an underground kiln and a surface polishing treatment using quartz.



Lake Country Museum Collection

The owl candle holder was made by Dona Rosa's son, Valente. It is one of thousands commissioned by the Owl Rexall Drug Company. A candle is placed inside the owl and the resulting flame illuminates the owl's eyes.

Floral Owl

The most well-known Mexican handcrafts are ceramics. This owl is a typical example of the ingenuity of Mexican artisans to adapt to the prominence of the tourist trade. It is finely painted and polished for lustre. Similar items can be found throughout the country but are also exported.

Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Ironwood Hawk/Eagle

The Seri Indians inhabit a coastal strip of desert along the Gulf of California in the state of Sonora, Mexico. Mobility was a necessity for their survival in the desert.

The carving of ironwood for trade (*Olneya tesota*) is a recent innovation within Seri culture. Traditionally, the Seri material culture was rather meager, yet each item that had been created to serve a specific purpose.

The inception of a carving for tourism for the Seri can be accredited to one man, Jose Astorga. His experimentation may have been prompted by an American woman who was working with ironwood while staying nearby. She told Astorga that she was making a desert tortoise to use as a doorstep for her home, and he responded that he, too, knew how to work ironwood. It was only a matter of time and progress that other Seri families followed suit.



Courtesy of The Okanagan Heritage Museum

Pink Skull (Calavera)

The Day of the Dead is considered to be the most important festival for many Mexicans. Its roots can be traced back to pre-Hispanic traditions, however, heavy influence from Roman Catholicism is also apparent. Colorful parties take place in the cemeteries and elaborate *ofrenda* altars are built in homes to honor specific family members who have passed on. The intent is to encourage visits by the souls to hear the prayers and the comments of the living directed to them. The skull is a universal decoration for this celebration. It can be made of a variety of materials, although traditionally sugar was the substance used.

Mexico, abundant in sugar production and too poor to buy fancy imported European church decorations, learned quickly from the friars how to make sugar art for their religious festivals. Sugar skulls represent a departed soul. The name of a deceased ancestor was written on the forehead and was placed on the home *ofrenda* or gravestone to honor the return of a particular spirit.