



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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TRADITION & CHANGE IN SAN PEDRO SACATEPÉQUEZ

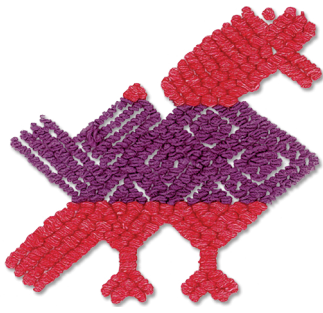
By Raymond Senuk

These are wedding *huipils* from San Pedro Sacatepéquez in the department of Guatemala.

The one on the top is from the 1910s, the one in the middle dates to the 1930s, and the one on the bottom dates to the 1970s/1980s. They are remarkably similar. Their iconographic composition is basically the same: trees of life and the same number of rows of zoomorphic figures. I find it remarkable that so many coincident features are present over a 70-year time period. These *huipils* show the strong prescriptive features of what defines a wedding *huipil* in San Pedro. Today, any person in San Pedro would recognize a wedding *huipil* from the early 20th century and know exactly what it was. Think about our own culture, especially fashion, and how much changes over even small periods of time, even a year or less.

These wedding *huipils* were always purple with accents of red. The dyes, however, would change over time. The early 20th century example would use murex (a natural dye obtained from a single valve mollusk) for purple and alizarin (an early synthetic dye of madder) for red. By 1930, murex was too expensive and difficult to obtain from the southern coast of Mexico.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



IN THE MUSEUM



As we prepare to celebrate our 41st anniversary with our annual Gala Dinner, we look back on the past few months with great pride.

✦ The Museum inaugurated a new exhibit, ***Hombres de Tradiciones y Costumbres***, in the Carolina Mini room. We had a private opening for the Sánchez family, who not only donated the pieces but also paid for their conservation. They have entrusted us with their family legacy, a commitment we were proud to accept. Suay Aksoy, President of International Council of Museums (ICOM) was part of the ribbon-cutting ceremony when it was opened to the public.

✦ Former international model and current philanthropist Christy Turlington's visit to the museum to present her movie *Con Madre* received a great deal of media attention and was well attended by the diplomatic corps, local authorities and members of an organization she supports, Corazón del Agua. She understands the important role midwives play in a country like Guatemala where there are just not enough doctors to attend all the births. It is a cause close to our hearts and a challenge many of our weavers face, so we were very happy to support her.

✦ Our art gallery spaces have been booked almost constantly and we have had a variety of exhibits from both established and up-and-coming artists. We were again the chosen venue for the Juannio latin-american art show this year.

✦ Museum-led workshops for *chachales*, embroidery, jaspe, and indigo dying have been filled to capacity and conferences on different textile themes have a very interesting and diverse following, from academics to devotees to designers.

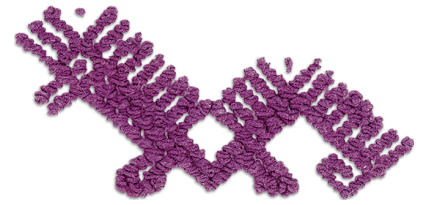
✦ The education department, now under Violeta's supervision, has been the busiest area. They have reached out to schools and are giving talks and workshops at the Colegio Maya... and other schools have shown interest in the Museum as well. The most exciting thing has been a field trip with a group to the *Cofradía* at Santo Domingo Xenacoj. As you may know, the giant photograph in the current *Cofradía* exhibit is from that church, and after attending several conferences a field trip was put together to put it all into context. They were delighted and it is certainly something we will do again.

✦ Looking forward, we are preparing our annual Gala Dinner. This year, the theme is *Noche De Chachales*, and we are honoring both Violeta Gutiérrez and Dialma Smith.

Left: The complex dyeing of tied thread for jaspe.

Right: *Hombres* private opening:

Jorge Sánchez Devanny, Maya Fledderjohn, Violeta Gutiérrez, Juan José Falla, and Lucia Olivero.



TRADITION & CHANGE...

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The first commercially pre-dyed purple threads made their way to Guatemala, and in San Pedro they supplanted murex in 1927. We know this from a sequence of ceremonial *servilletas* that are physically dated. By the time we get to the 1960s, a few things had changed. New threads – mercerized cottons – were now in abundant supply and available in almost unlimited colors. In this *huipil*, the mercerized threads are used to fill previously empty space with small figures and design elements. Interestingly, the base figures by prescription remain purple with red accents, and the new colors never encroach on these figures. Another small but important feature that appeared on all *huipils* from San Pedro prior to 1940 was the presence of small crosses emanating from the neck opening. Some time after 1940, these crosses started to disappear.

One more comment about dyestuffs relevant to this discussion...before German synthetic

dyes made their way to Guatemala some time in the later part of the 19th century, there was no dye for producing a fast red on cotton fiber. You may ask *did they not have cochineal?* Of course they did, but cochineal has much more affinity to form a chemical bond on animal fiber, both wool and silk, than on cotton. They had no sophisticated mordant to aid in the process. As a result, red cotton was disproportionately more popular than other colors for decades after synthetic dyes were introduced. In the early *huipil* from the 1910s, the proportion of red to purple is much greater, with some figures completely brocaded in red.

This article is meant as an introduction to the upcoming exhibit **Mayan Traje: A Tradition in Transition** set to open on July 21, 2019 and run to October 13, 2019 at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, and curated from the collection of the Friends of the Ixchel Museum.



AS POSTED ON SJQUILTMUSEUM.ORG

MAYAN TRAJE: A TRADITION IN TRANSITION

JULY 21, 2019 – OCTOBER 13, 2019

TURNER AND GILLILAND GALLERIES

at San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles

Ceremonial huipil
(woman's blouse)
Santa Lucía Uatlán
1930's/1940's

The Maya of Guatemala are known worldwide for their excellent weaving and distinctive *trajes* (traditional clothing). These were once 100% village-specific, and people could be recognized as being from a specific place. Over time, many and diverse influences have caused significant change – but even so, visitors are struck by the ubiquitous nature of indigenous weaving and the persistence of their “wearable art”. This exhibit will show you outstanding examples of clothing from the early 20th century through to contemporary fashion, highlight key differences, and explore some of the reasons for these changes. On view will be individual pieces as well as full *trajes* – none created for tourist markets. These will be drawn from the rarely-displayed collection of the Friends of the Ixchel Museum. – sjquiltmuseum.org

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No part of this communication is intended as tax or estate planning advice



Located on 6a Calle final, zona 10, on the grounds of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala City.

Open 9 am to 5 pm M-F | 9 am to 1 pm 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
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FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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