



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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HUIPILS FROM THE ALTA VERAPAZ THE LEGACY OF MARGARET JULIA WARD LEWIS

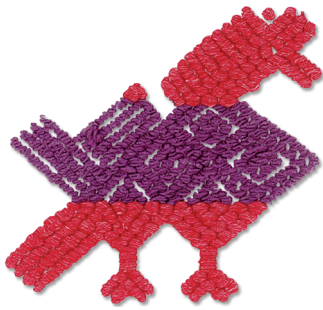
By: Raymond Senuk

On New Year's Day 1929, Margaret Julia Ward disembarked in Puerto Barrios with her husband of two months, Bevan Blau Lewis, beginning a life in Guatemala that would continue for the next 15 years. They were both trained as civil engineers at Purdue University where they met and fell in love. Bevan was to work for the United Fruit Company and later the International Railways of Central America. Their three oldest children, all daughters, were born in Guatemala. Margaret had become the friend of Carmen Pettersen, a renowned Guatemalan artist, who originally specialized in landscapes and later became known for her watercolors of Maya in traje (costume) published as the *Maya of Guatemala*. Their

friendship and correspondence continued until Margaret's death in 1955.

Whether her friendship with Carmen Pettersen influenced her interest in Maya weaving is unknown, but she did make a small collection of pieces. What I find remarkable about the holding is the consistent high quality. Margaret had a great eye. Many of the textiles come from places that were close to Guatemala City – San Pedro Sacatepéquez, Mixco, Palín, Chínautla and San Antonio Aguas Calientes. Villages near Lake Atitlán are also represented. The pieces I find the most interesting are from the Alta and Baja Verapaz. The textile tradition in these departments is alive and well, and in some cases there is an active revival of fine weaving.

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IN THE MUSEUM

By Maya Fledderjohn

Top: The *Cofradía* exhibit at Bantrab
Bottom: Bordados past exhibit has new life as a web e-exhibit



✦ Gala Benefit

As the second semester of 2017 rolls around, the Museum prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary. A gala benefit will be held in October including a dinner, live music and a collective and retrospective art exhibit with artists that have exhibited in the Ixchel Museum over the years. A special invitation to participate will be sent out to the artists, and the exhibit will then be curated and put up in our galleries to be sold at the gala. We have decided that instead of having one honoree, this year we will honor the employees at the Museum, especially those that have been with us for a number of years.

✦ Outside the Museum

The museum has begun working with Bantrab and they asked for a special *Cofradía* exhibit at their headquarters for their employees and customers to enjoy during the month of September – the month during which Guatemala celebrates its independence. There also has been discussion of future projects and support for the Museum.

✦ New Exhibit

Violeta Gutiérrez has secured the funds for a new exhibit in the Museum. We realize that while a lot of attention is paid to the traditional women's dress, there is little on the men's. A new exhibit dedicated to men's attire will go up where *suts* are now. The 2018 calendar is also dedicated to men's traditional dress. We hope to inaugurate the exhibit during the Friends' visit to Guatemala in March 2018 for their annual meeting.

✦ Legislation

There have been a lot of discussions on a possible law that would "copyright" some of the weavers' designs. The Museum's by-laws expressly position it as apolitical and therefore unable to support a legislative initiative. Our mission is to safeguard community skills and knowledge. We still don't know if this law will pass and if so how it would be reinforced. But nonetheless, it has generated an interesting and ongoing discussion about cultural appropriation.

✦ Fulbright Specialist

Looking ahead, in January 2018 we will be hosting and working with a Fulbright Specialist. This program sends US faculty and professionals to serve as expert consultants on a variety of topics. It is supported by US embassies and binational Fulbright Commissions – the Museum competed with various other projects and won! Our specialist will be Kelly Cobb (Assistant Professor) from the University of Delaware who has experience in cross-cultural heritage textile projects. She will be investigating how weavers can adapt their work to more sustainable/eco-friendly materials and how these adaptations might encourage the integration of indigenous weavers beyond "handicraft" into commercial markets for art, fashion and interiors in the US, Europe and Asia.





HUIPILS FROM THE ALTA VERAPAZ

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But for collectors of older material, these villages represent a challenge. For whatever reason, these towns are under-represented in older museum collections, with the exception of the Penn Museum in Philadelphia.



Robert Burkitt collected for the (then) University Museum which was later renamed the Penn Museum. Burkitt first traveled with G.B. Gordon on an archaeological expedition to Copán in 1894 and remained in Guatemala until his death in 1945. He had an agreement with the museum to collect artifacts for their collection. About 20 *huipils* from Alta Verapaz towns made their way to the museum. These *huipils* were accessioned in 1929 but could have been collected earlier. The salient part of this is that two of the *huipils* donated by the Lewis siblings compare favorably to these early examples.

All the threads are flat cottons dyed with early synthetic dyestuffs. Mercerized cottons begin to appear in Guatemala in the 1920's. Remarkably, the weavers of the Alta Verapaz were early adopters of mercerized threads, so that textiles from the 1920's and 1930's could have

mercerized cottons used as brocade threads. All the Alta Verapaz textiles collected in the 1930's by Lilly de Jongh Osborne and Howard Tewksbury housed at the Penn Museum contain mercerized threads. The Lewis *huipils* are important early textiles from Tactic and Tamahú, and the Friends of the Ixchel are lucky to have them.

Interestingly, two of the three Lewis Alta Verapaz *huipils* are unfinished. The neck hole is not cut out and the *huipil* is not sewn at the sides. This is not that unusual; often unfinished *huipils* were used as head coverings, shoulder cloths and ceremonial textiles to carry ritual objects. The *huipil* on indigo base cloth is finished and shows signs of wear. The purple accent thread is mercerized cotton. The Friends of the Ixchel Museum has been selected to mount an exhibition at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles in California in mid-2019, and we plan to include textiles from the Lewis donation.

I would like to thank the Lewis family for their kind donation of these textiles. In particular we thank Georgia Morehouse and Carol Lewis, two of the three sisters born in Guatemala, for all the information they have provided about their mother, Margaret Julia Ward Lewis.



Cover: Unfinished Tactic *huipil* from the Lewis donation. It dates to the 1920's or earlier

Top: Huipil from Tamahú on indigo base cloth probably dates to the 1930's

Bottom: Detail of the cover huipil from Tactic - classic design elements from the Alta Verapaz using an early classic color scheme

WELCOME TO ALEJANDRO MALESPIN



Friends is delighted to welcome Alejandro Malespin to our Board...brought in by Joe Borgatti. Based in New York, Alex has accumulated 20 years of wide-ranging experience in the financial industry, including investment banking, asset management, and private banking. For more than a decade, he has concentrated on clients in Mexico and Central America. Prior to joining Morgan Stanley Private Wealth management, he served as a Private Banker and Managing Director at Credit Suisse and worked for 15 years at JP Morgan. He holds an MBA from Harvard University, and a B.S. *Cum Laude* in economics from the Universidad Francisco Marroquín.

Alex resides in Rye, NY with his wife Joanna and their two teenage boys. He is active in philanthropic activities in his native Nicaragua – Joanna (née Bartlett) is Guatemalan. In his free time, Alex enjoys driving, golf, and skiing. We are very happy to welcome him to our team.

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ADVANCING AUDIOVISUAL ACCESS

For the past couple of years, both the Museum and the Friends have been working to improve your access to information about the stunning and globally-praised textiles housed in Guatemala. We have recently refreshed and cross-linked both our website and the Museum's site is now available in English throughout.

Now available on both websites, experience...

- A virtual tour, designed by curator Violeta Gutiérrez and local grad students, takes you through the permanent galleries of the Museum. Currently in Spanish only, it will soon be available in English.
- An e-exhibit based on the Bordados display is our first foray into capturing temporary exhibitions and making them "armchair".
- A deep dive into the Museum and its collection is provided by the Google Cultural Institute. The Museo Ixchel

joins other world-class museums featured by this global Google Arts and Culture project via breath-taking photos which tour you through the halls and show a selection of the collection pieces.

Visit us and enjoy

**ixchelfriends.org &
museoixchel.org**



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 or telephone 502 2331 3622



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

PO Box 30, Princeton, NJ 08542 USA

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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