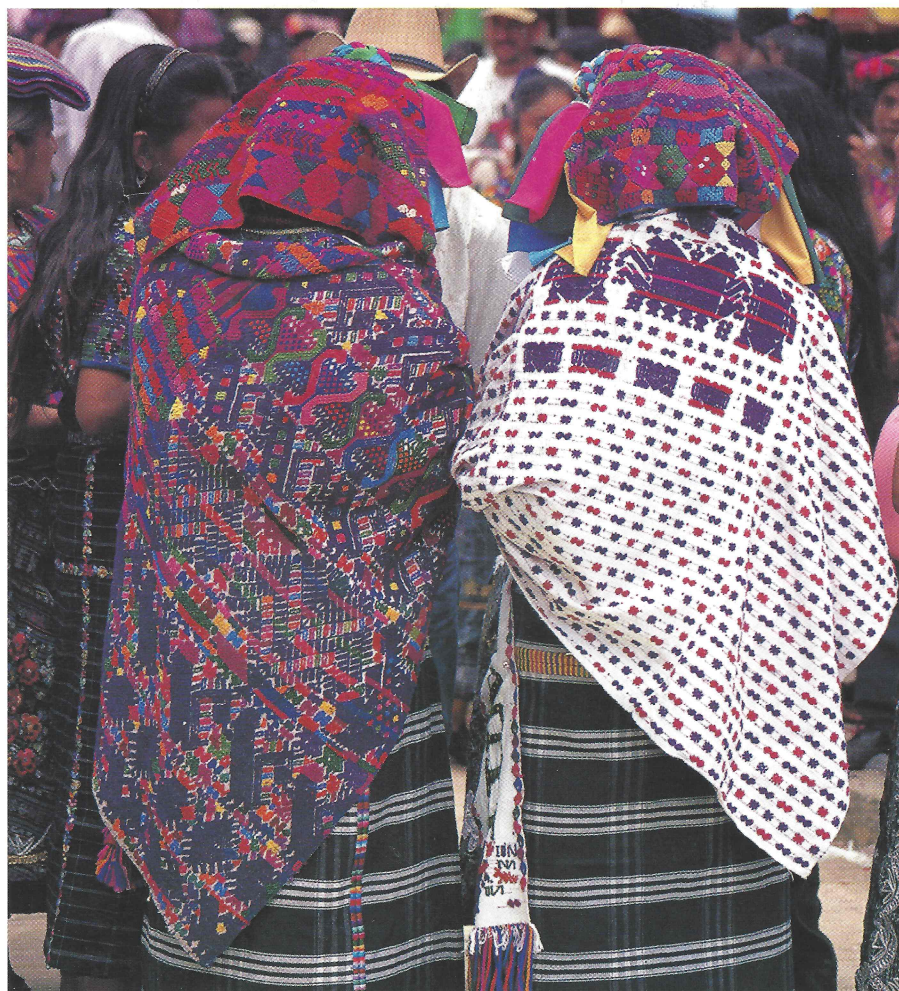


FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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thoughts about selling it. A day later, I got 'lucky' – it was still available. I stared at that huipil for a week and was never quite sure it was authentic, but eventually I talked myself into buying it.

A day later another dealer offered me a saint's huipil from Aguacatán. It was so badly made that I knew the truth: I had bought a copy. Over the next few days, after seeing the recent acquisitions of local collectors and shopkeepers, I appreciated the full extent of the hoax. The pieces were just wrong – the wrong colors, proportions, and threads. After convincing

FAKE! WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A GOOD GUATEMALAN TEXTILE COMMANDS MORE THAN \$3,000 IN THE MARKET?

By Raymond E. Senuk

It is too good to be true: you just found a three-paneled cofradia huipil from the highland village of Santa Apolonia. It was expensive, but the dealer had two other clients who wanted to see it—and they were ready to buy. So you had to decide immediately. Well, unless you are sure you know exactly what you are looking at, it could indeed be too good to be true.

I discovered this unpleasant truth the hard way. After a five month absence, I returned to Antigua in March 2000. In those five months, a number of unusual textiles had become available. Within a week, a dealer approached me to buy an Aguacatán three paneled cofradia huipil. When could I see it? I would have to wait because another client was looking at it and the Aguacatán woman who owned it was having second

my friends of our folly, we confronted the dealers. Deny! Deny! Deny! They were shocked – they were only middlemen who had also been taken in and had made little money for their work. This tall tale matched the ones that had accompanied the textiles to begin with.

There has always been a tradition of making textiles for the 'tourist' market. It began as early as the 1930's with servilletas and men's head tzutes from Chichicastenango. These are interesting pieces that were either woven very loosely or made using colors that were never part of the village repertoire. It is not unusual to find these pieces in old museum collections in the United States. The object was not to deceive the buyer but to provide a product for the tourist market.

...continued inside.

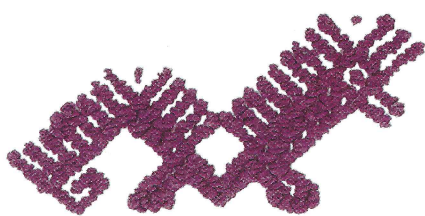
Top left: Authentic Patzun huipiles

Photo Paola Gianturco.

Top right: This stunning textile was presented as a huipil from Aguacatán. Small details—like the warp selvages, for example, and the colors of the warp and weft—betray it as a fake.

Bottom right: Authentic textile.

FAKE! CONTINUED



Top: While the embroidery on this textile from San Mateo Ixtatán is beautifully done, it is done with silk—a thread used rarely in authentic pieces.

Bottom: Authentic textile

Raymond Senuk has been collecting Guatemalan textiles for thirty years. A retired banker, he lives with his wife in Antigua and St. Louis, Missouri. He has published several articles on Guatemala textile and has curated a number of textile exhibitions at Saint Louis Art Museum, the University of Southern Indiana, and the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

through two pieces of cloth for warmth). This is innovation for the market—not making pieces to cheat or deceive the buyer.

That changed in the early 1980's. Many older traditional textiles were lost in the disastrous earthquake of 1976. People were becoming interested in ethnographic textiles from all parts of the world. Guatemala textiles were considered to be desirable to a new generation of collectors and museum curators who actively pursued the best examples. Demand was up! Supply was down! Huipiles from Chuarancho, Almolonga, Sololá, Santa Lucia Utatlan, Santa Maria Visitación and other villages—all richly brocaded in silk—became available. Saints' huipiles/shirts appeared that were heavily embroidered in silk on striped indigo base cloth. (One reason that many collectors do not know what a servilleta from Patzicia looks like is that most were cut up to make these shirts). Full men's ceremonial traje from Sololá were available.

The trouble was, none of these textiles was ever used ethnographically. They were woven with the idea of deceiving collectors into buying rare tex-

During the 1960's and 70's, a few collectors commissioned older women to make copies of antique huipiles from fragments or badly damaged examples. They never presented these as old, but as examples of things that once existed. Also in the 1970's, non-traditional huipiles from Santa Maria de Jesus were made in various colors in a cofradia style that were sold to be worn as dresses. This was also done with huipiles from San Juan Atitán. San Mateo Ixtatán huipiles were embroidered on a single piece of commercial cloth using non-traditional colors (normally they were embroidered

tiles that they knew existed but were never able to collect or for that matter even seen before. This episode was not as well organized or as blatant as what happened in 2000 and it persisted for many years. I remember seeing copies of Chuarancho cofradia huipiles for sale well into the late 1990s. I am still not sure if there ever was a Santa Maria Visitación huipil or if they were only the product of someone's imagination.

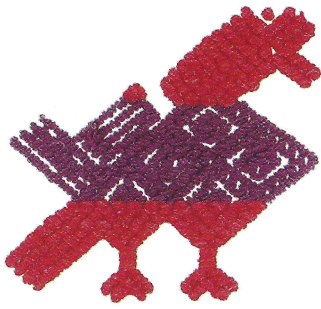
Sometime in early 2000 two unscrupulous dealers, whom I had known for many years, had clients willing to pay dearly for examples of rare Guatemala textiles. The only thing the dealers needed were the textiles! One client thought he would help and provided color copies of pieces published in Textile Arts #28, Spring 1984 (a well illustrated Japanese publication with high quality images). Armed with a well-documented wish list, the dealers found a number of talented weavers and some number of damaged silk shawls that provided the threads for the brocade. A few months later textiles started appearing.

Each had a good story. For example, seven women from San Mateo Ixtatán wove these huipiles in silk in 1940 when they were members of the same cofradia (unfortunately silk was sparingly or almost never used in Ixtatán). Or try this: a priest in San Juan Cotzal had these huipiles on display in a small museum and sold them because he needed the money for his parish (unfortunately this museum never existed). You get the idea.

Another strategy used by these dealers was to seed a town with fake textiles and then take the client there "to see what they could find." Did they find one or two cofradia huipiles in Aguacatán? Why find only one or two that could be sold for \$1000 apiece when ten are possible! Common sense was completely overtaken by greed and coveting on the part of both the clients and the dealers. I know of two collectors who paid in excess of \$60,000 for fake textiles from these dealers in a period of two months. In fact, some very knowledgeable dealers, shopkeepers, and collectors were taken in by the copies and purchased some.

What is the moral of this tale? Let the buyer beware. When a good textile can command more than \$3000, someone will take the opportunity to commission fakes for the market. It is the collectors' responsibility to know the material. Deal with people you know and who have a reputation to protect. Understand that at these prices you are making an investment. Don't believe the stories. The more elaborate the story, the less likely it is to be true. The textiles should speak for themselves. Knowing what the piece should look like overall—specifically the size, proportions, colors, threads, how the panels are joined, how the selvages are finished—is more important than the tall tales that accompany the textiles. Take it from one who was burned.





DONATIONS

Please help Friends of the Ixchel Museum sponsor weaving projects, fund traveling textile exhibits, translate textile research, and support projects to enrich the Ixchel Museum.

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THE MUSEUM

The Galvez Suárez exhibit, written about in our June bulletin, opened July 25th with the painter's two sons cutting the inaugural ribbon while "The Rainmakers" played music on Mayan instruments.

"Informative pages" on thirteen more textile villages have been published, bringing the total to 20. The funding was provided by Friends of the Ixchel Museum.

The Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation of New York City has generously funded two Ixchel Museum field projects: a research project to study and photograph the weaving tradition of San Juan Atitán, and a rural children's weaving project with fifth graders in Santiago Sacatepéquez.

Thirty eight textiles, mostly huipiles and over huipiles, have been donated to the museum in memory of Anneke Nottebohm de Balzarretti by her mother, Vera Nottebohm, and her sisters, Verena and Marlene.

In accordance with its mission to promote Guatemala's weaving tradition, the museum put up two temporary exhibits with ten mannequins each, one in the Peri-Roosevelt shopping center and the other in the American School for Independence Day Sept. 15th.

200 rural schoolchildren from all over the country have come to the Ixchel Museum every Friday for the last three months as part of a joint program with the Ministries of Culture and Education. The children spend two hours at the museum where they are divided into groups of 20 each and toured through

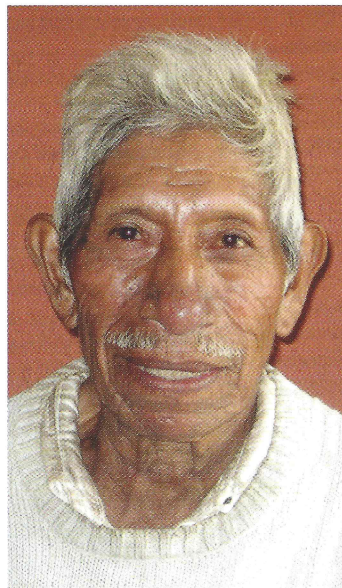
the museum exhibits. In each area, they are given a puzzle to solve, a design to find, something to look for. Afterwards they have activities in the Alberto Habie Children's Museum within the Ixchel Museum.

San Lucas Tolimán is a village where Fabiana de Saenz, Museum Director of Education, oversees a weaving project with 100 fifth graders. The children came into the museum to see examples of their own town's weavings and to see weavings of other communities. Usually when they return to their village only about one-fourth of the children choose

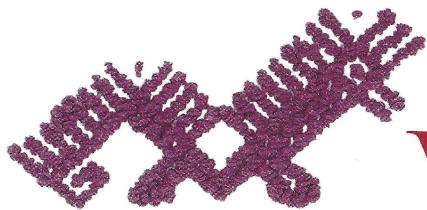
to learn to weave. But in San Lucas, the school director said that all the children would participate. The girls will weave a length of the village huipil and the boys will learn to make small baskets. Years ago San Lucas made the reed (caña de carillo) baskets used for harvesting coffee, but now plastic baskets are used. Only one man from San Lu-

cas, Leopoldo Gomez Castro, 79 years old, remains as an artist in weaving baskets. He will teach the boys to make smaller baskets that can be used in their households for tortillas or bread. The parents were so pleased with the project that they paid part of the cost of the course so that all the children could participate. Says Barbara Knoke de Arathoon, acting curator of the Ixchel Museum, "It is exciting to see the enthusiasm of San Lucas Tolimán; it proves how important the weaving tradition is."

Santa Abelina, Quiché, is participating for the third year in the museum's weaving course. The programs in Santa Abelina are sponsored by HELPS International, an American foundation.



Top: Thelma Wilmensen, Barbara de Arathoon, Alfredo Galvez Moran, Arnoldo Galvez Moran, and Susan de Riojas open the Galvez Suárez exhibit. Bottom Left: Leopoldo Gomez Castro. Bottom Right: Santa Abelina Quiché



VITAL SIGNS: ¡VIVA COI

All photos this story:
Paola Gianturco



By far the most striking portraits are those that focus on indigenous women's clothing.

Photojournalist Paola Gianturco, a member of Friends whose pro bono project in 2000 was to document weavers in 15 highland villages for the Ixchel Museum's photo archive, has included many of those images in her new book, *¡Viva Colores! A Salute to the Indomitable People of Guatemala* (powerHouse Books; \$40; www.vivacolores.com).

The first of her three books, *In Her Hands, Craftswomen Changing the World*, shows how indigenous craftswomen who live on less than \$1 a day are feeding and educating their children with the money they earn. Gianturco and her co-author, Toby Tuttle, visited Guatemala in 1997 to interview and photograph weavers. Leslie Claxton Wilson introduced her to FOIM cofounder Baysis Hempstead and the Ixchel Museum. One chapter of *In Her Hands* featured the Museum's Pro-Teje Project.

Gianturco returned to Guatemala five times over the past ten years. Each time she completed an assignment she took additional photographs for herself; Gianturco had fallen in love with the country and its people.

That love informs her latest book, *¡Viva Colores!*. It consists of Gianturco's photos and her writer husband David Hill's mini-profiles of 41 Guatemalans—"everyday heroes," she calls them—who are rebuilding their nation. Take Fermin Ortega Herrera, a former sugar cane worker, who turned out to be a talented builder and now heads a team that builds water



LORES AND VIVA PAOLA!

systems for highland villages. Or Hermine de Murralles who sold tortillas as a young girl and now oversees the school systems of 321 municipalities. And yes, there are weavers, all effective entrepreneurs.

The book celebrates the indomitable spirit of Guatemalans who use color to express their vitality and valor, despite the fact that their recent history is black: the 36-year civil war disrupted more than a million lives; an estimated 75% of the population lives in poverty; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes have been calamitous.

The feeling of optimism in *Viva Colores!* is greatly enhanced by the images. In fact, Gianturco's photographs of colorful house facades, storefronts, buses, market displays and—especially—of hand

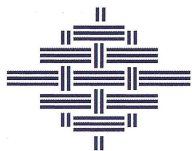
woven textiles steal the show. "Colors", says the photographer, "have long had meaning for Mayans: Black represents the west, where the sun sets; red stands for east where the sun rises; white signifies north where the rains comes from, and yellow, south, where the sun shines."

**Gianturco clearly
celebrates color for
color's sake**

Well and good. But Gianturco clearly celebrates color for color's sake and by far the most striking portraits are those that focus on indigenous women's clothing. The textiles are unique, glorious not only in themselves but also in their context as everyday garb. As the Ixchel Museum has often pointed out, costumes lend meaning and identity to the wearer and life to the landscape. They are a national treasure. The book title says it all: *viva colores!*

Women from Churranchó, Guatemala dressed in traditional hand woven clothing.





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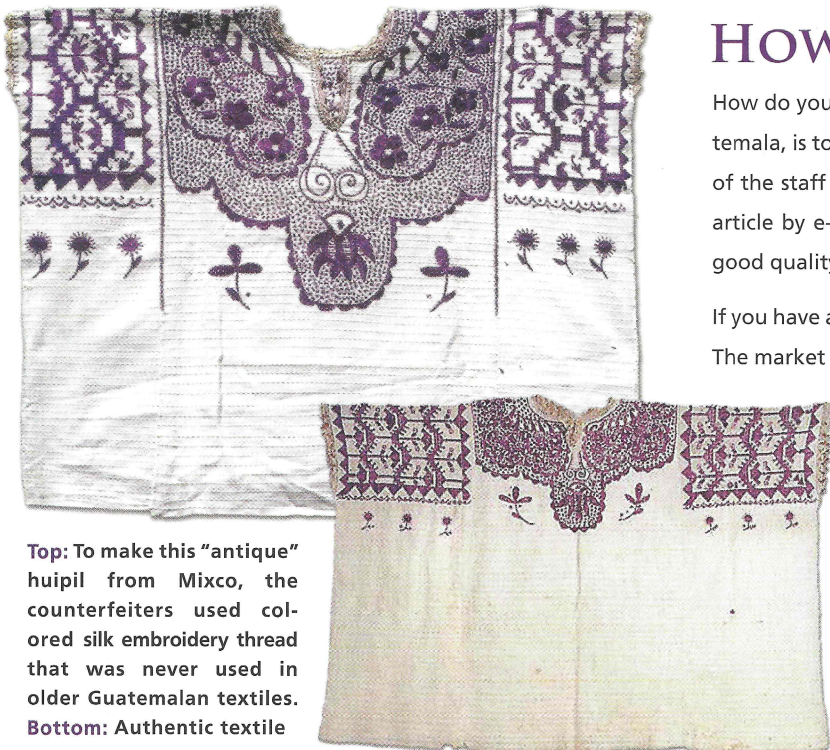
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HOW DO YOU TELL A FAKE?

How do you tell if you have a fake? One way, if you happen to be in Guatemala, is to go to the Museo Ixchel, where, for a slight consideration, one of the staff can assess your textile. Or you can contact the author of this article by e-mail at raysenuk@earthlink.net to get his opinion. Send two good quality photos, only two per message.

If you have a genuine piece, it will probably be worth thousands of dollars. The market for old Guatemalan textiles is very small at the high end. Most of the best works are already in private collections or museums in Guatemala or the U.S. It is rare to find an important textile in a village or local market, so new additions to the stock are increasingly valuable.

While this situation of high demand and low supply would seem to be perfect breeding ground for counterfeiters, one thing holds the bad guys back. It is very difficult to produce a good fake. The expert weavers exist, but the proper, old materials are just not available. —R.S.



Top: To make this "antique" huipil from Mixco, the counterfeiters used colored silk embroidery thread that was never used in older Guatemalan textiles.

Bottom: Authentic textile