



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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by Hideo Kojima

Natural dyes
have a long
history and
[just maybe]
a bright
future.

The Maya had five basic colors—red, white, black, yellow and green—that were based on their cultural world view. Each of the four cardinal points of the compass was ruled by a different god, each of which had its own color: east was red, north was white, west was black and south was yellow, while the center of the earth was green. The various ceremonies or festivals, the painting of the temples or ancient writings, the murals, the colors of the pottery, the body painting, even the ceremonial robes of the ruler and priests—all of these had their own prescribed colors that were based on this world view.

The Maya world view was not limited to the center of the world and four directions, what could be described as a two-dimensional or horizontal world. It also incorporated thirteen layers of heaven that were situated above the world and nine layers of a subterranean world. In other words, the Maya believed in a three-dimensional world containing both horizontal and vertical worlds, all full of color.

Mesoamerica—the area of Mexico/Central America where the Maya flourished—is particularly rich in plants that can be used for food, medicine or dyeing. Combinations of altitude and geographical latitude

provided a huge range of varying environments which combined with the rhythm of rainy and dry seasons to give birth to a plethora of diverse plant life that was unknown in Europe. Over a long period of time, these valuable plants were cultivated and used by the native inhabitants. In this article, I will briefly look at four of the natural dyes that have been most highly prized since ancient times.

Anil (Indigo): Blue dye was obtained from a variety of indigo plant called Jiquilite. Proof of pre-Columbian use of anil can be found in the so-called “Maya Blue” that colors the remaining wall-paintings, pottery or illustrated writing, in fragments of cloth that have been discovered in caves or tombs and in the records of the conquistadors. The superiority of the dye obtained from this species of indigo was recognized very early in the colonial period. It was shipped to Spain where the king ordered it be developed on a commercial basis. The resulting industry that arose in Central America led to anil overtaking cacao production in the 17th century to become the main export.

Because the production of natural indigo continued in El Salvador until the 1970s, many people who

...continued inside.



A WORLD OF COLOR CONTINUED

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used to work in the industry are still alive today and thus there is widespread knowledge about its production. With the end of the civil war in El Salvador, the government has started to revive the indigo industry as part of its policies to resuscitate and diversify the economy.

Shellfish Purple: Purple dye can be obtained from various shellfish throughout the world. In Mesoamerica it comes from the excretions of a species of sea snail that lives on the rocks of the Pacific coast. The oldest extant example of shellfish purple from the Maya territories is a fragment of cloth, dating back to the beginning of the 16th century, that was discovered in the Chiptic cave in Chiapas. But by the 1980s, use of the shellfish purple dye had diminished until it was limited to three tribes who lived on the Pacific coast. Since then, destruction of the environment due to tourism and over-fishing resulted in fears of the shellfish's extinction. Fortunately, starting with Mexico, researchers began studying the ecosystem, social culture, economics and biology. This has led to a campaign to preserve the sea snails. A revolutionary law has already been passed, recognizing the shellfish's position as both a cultural property and economic resource.

Cochineal: Originating in Mexico, cochineal is produced from a species of scale insect that lives on the Opuntia cactus. Like the shellfish purple, it belongs to the rare group of natural dyes that are obtained from animals. Mainly used to dye wool or silk, it produces a red color.

In the early colonial period, it was a valuable product unique to Mexico; large quantities of it were exported to Spain. Cochineal was also among the goods that were sent across the Pacific Ocean to the Far East. Woolen fabric dyed with cochineal was brought to Japan by the Portuguese during the Warring States period in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Cochineal production in Guatemala began in 1812. By 1825 it represented the country's main export. The Spanish colonists made huge profits from this dye. In an effort to hide the fact that it was produced from the bodies of insects, they referred to the scale insects as "grain." To meet the increased worldwide demand for cochineal in various diverse applications, the insects are now being artificially raised in Peru, Mexico, Chile and the Canary Islands.

Logwood: Logwood is the most commonly used black dye and is obtained from a leguminous plant.



It dyes easily to produce a beautiful, deep black color. As a result, it has become indispensable to textile manufacturers in London and to the Japanese dying industry in Kyoto.

A native product of Mesoamerica, it did not become known in Europe until the 16th century. For one hundred years after the conquistadors introduced the dye, Spain monopolized the logwood trade, earning huge profits.

Even after Spain lost its colony of Jamaica to the British in the 17th century, thereby losing its monopoly on logwood, demand for the dye grew prodigiously. In the latter half of the 19th century, Britain imported in excess of 60,000 tons of the dye. In the First World War, imports rose to 135,000 tons by 1916 because the main producers of artificial dyes were situated in Germany, unable to continue production. After the war, each country began its own production of artificial substitutes, and the demand for logwood began to fall. This situation was exacerbated by the oil crisis of the '70s, which raised transportation costs, and demand continues to dwindle.

As scientific advances have led to the invention of more convenient artificial dyes, many of the useful plants that were grown from ancient times by the native inhabitants were forgotten or ignored. Recently, however, there has been a growing tendency to distrust science and look instead to traditional natural products. The writer believes that the revival and adoption of this kind of natural product will create new industries for the future that are kinder to both mankind and his environment.

Hideo Kojima is a Visiting Scholar from Japan's Kyoto Latin American Research Institute. He is also a longtime friend of the Ixchel Museum who recently gave the museum several skeins of thread colored by natural dyes. Mr. Kojima is working on projects to grow and use natural dyes in El Salvador and the Guatemalan town of San Juan la Laguna.



Top right
Shellfish Purple
natural dye. Sea
shells from the Pacific
Coast and the dyed skeins.

Bottom left
Scale insects that live on the
Opuntia cactus and produce the
natural red dye, cochineal.



THE MUSEUM



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Our new exhibition, "Embroidery: Stitches that Unite Cultures," opened October 24th. Designed by David Ordoñez, it was mounted by Marilda del Pilar Cruz and curated by Barbara Knoke de Arathoon. Friends of the Ixchel Museum funded the installation as well as the research that informs the show. In total, the research team logged over 600 km. visited 11 communities and took 490 photographs to document the exhibit. All of which proves Barbara Arathoon's pithy dictum: "Research is the soul of our work."

The ever-popular Carmen Pettersen Room in the museum has been renovated. The artist's watercolors have been cleaned, photographed, reframed and rehung. Textiles featured in the paintings are now in pullout drawers, where they can be easily viewed. In the center of the room, children's costumed mannequins recreate one of the scenes Pettersen painted.

The afore mentioned Marilda del Pilar Cruz has joined the museum as exhibit designer and assistant to Barbara de Arathoon. Pilar has a degree in architecture from the Francisco Marroquín University in Guatemala City and a Masters degree in Preservation Studies from Tulane University in New Orleans.

Speaking of staff, our Education Director Fabiana de Saenz has won a scholarship from the Spanish Ministry of Culture to attend a month-long course, "Museums, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, at the Museo de América in Madrid. Before settling in the Spanish capital, she will spend a week in Barcelona where she will attend another course—"Preventive Conservation of a Textile Heritage"—at the Centro de Documentación of the Museo Textile

Smart shopping: The museum store now has the English version of the catalogue for the "Sown Symbols" exhibition (US\$8). The translation was funded by the Friends of the Ixchel Museum. Also available is the handsome 2008 Ixchel Museum Calendar, "Headdresses: Icons of Tradition" (US\$15). And soon the shop itself will be more accessible. Thanks to a generous award of US\$5,000 from U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, the museum store is being put on the web. You can do your shopping online after January 31, 2008.

An Ixchel Museum education project with about 50 fifth graders in Santiago Sacatepéquez has proved to be so popular that, instead of the usual 30 percent of the children choosing to learn to weave, 100 percent of them asked for instruction. To meet the unexpected demand, the kids have had to share looms, a potential problem that has proved to be the opposite. "It is phenomenal



how the children support each other, and each pair helps the others," says Fabiana de Saenz, Director of Education. The project was funded by the Daniel Agostino Foundation of New York.

Briefly noted: The Ixchel Museum Committee for an Endowment Fund has received four generous pledges to be paid over three years and will begin a more expansive campaign in Guatemala in January... The Christmas Extravaganza, the opening night of the Christmas Bazaar, was held on November 13, attracting a great crowd of museum friends and supporters... Last September 3-26, the Ixchel Museum mounted an exhibition of traditional costumes in the town of Pradera Concepción Mall. This past August 30, an afternoon of bridge and canasta was held to raise funds.

Report on a Field-trip: Barbara Knoke de Arathoon, anthropologist and Anne Girard de Marroquín, photographer, undertook a short field trip to survey to state-of-the art of embroidery in 11 highland villages. Violeta Gutiérrez de Cifuentes, Registrar of the Museum's collection joined them for part of it. They drove 611 kilometers for six days and conducted interviews with people, mainly women, who were very happy to share their views on an art which brings joy and satisfaction to their lives, plus extra income. Anne took 490 photographs and all in all, the researchers

came back satisfied with the results, which will provide documentation for the embroidery exhibition.

Embroidery has been traditionally used to embellish the huipiles of several of the visited towns. The work has in the past been done exclusively by Maya woman. But in Totoncapán, the researchers were astonished to find a second generation family of Ladino women who embroider blouses for Maya women. Another surprise came in Sololá, where men can be seen in the local market machine-embroidering the distinctive motifs of the huipiles. This, says the research team, is a sign of drastic changes....

Top (right to left)

An embroidered cloth from Patzún worn on the head on a white veil, embroidering in Cantel on a table frame, the neckline of a huipil from San Andrés Xecul, children beginning to weave.

Bottom

The children of Santiago Sacatepéquez ready to begin the weaving project.





GREAT EXPECTATIONS



Left and below
Products to be sold
at the Santa Fe
Folk Art Market.

FOIM shoots for Santa Fe and the Folk Art Market next July

July 12 and 13th are the dates for the fifth annual Folk Art Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Friends is applying to have a booth at this two day event. In conjunction with this expectation, we are working with Shiprock Santa Fe, a world-class gallery of Native American art, to have an exhibit of antique Guatemalan textiles with a special opening event to coincide with the market weekend.

If accepted by the market jury, who select approximately 150 artists from around the world to demonstrate and sell their native folk art, we will have a booth featuring a collection of hand selected weavings that best represent the textile arts of



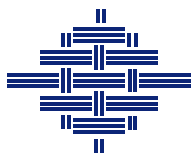
Guatemala. Sabina Ramirez, a master weaver from Nebaj will be our guest artist along with two additional artists: Byron Anibal Toscano Bejarano, from Antigua, who creates crosses in wrought iron and the traditional painted wooden boxes made by Don Jesus Manuel Garcia Xuruc, from Totonicapán.

A selection of special antique textiles drawn from the Friends archives and from a select group of private collections is planned at Shiprock Santa Fe who has graciously invited us to exhibit at their gallery and join forces for an opening event right before the Folk Art market weekend. Ray Senuk from our board will curate the show which will run for two to three weeks beginning the week of July 7th.

The Santa Fe Folk Art Market just completed its fourth year. It is the vibrantly exciting and successful venture of the International Folk Art Museum and drew upwards of 18,000 visitors this year. The focus

...continued on back.





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GREAT EXPECTATIONS CONTINUED

is the artists and their craft with attention to quality and authenticity. We visited this year's market and, if we are fortunate to be accepted, we will truly be able to present the textile arts of Guatemala in the best possible light.

We will hear if we have been accepted in December and, if the Goddess Ixchel is with us, you will hear the details in our June, 2008 newsletter and you can make plans to join us in Santa Fe.



The Board of Directors of FOIM is enormously grateful to our volunteers who have contributed close to \$8,000, significant in-kind donations and countless hours on this project.

Special thanks to:

Vicki Bauer, Moraga, CA

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If you would like to help sponsor this special project, please include a note along with your check that your donation is earmarked for the "Santa Fe Market". You will help us purchase textiles to sell at the market and support our artists. If accepted, you can volunteer as well! Contact: Leslie Wilson at leslieclaxton@sbcglobal.net

THE CASE FOR NATURAL DYES

There are readily understandable reasons Guatemalan weavers nowadays use threads colored by artificial dyes much more than those colored by natural dyes. The chemical ones are cheaper to buy and easier and less time-consuming to apply. Nonetheless, the Ixchel Museum strongly supports what seems to be the beginnings of a comeback of natural dyes. For one thing, as Hideo Kojima points out in his article, the natural dyes are kinder to the environment than chemical dyes. For another, they produce more beautiful, less uniform results. The museum's collection includes pieces woven with threads colored by natural dyes, and they have a beautiful, distinctive patina. That beauty translates into added value—the weavers can sell their handwoven handicrafts for higher prices that help to raise their standard of living. Natural dyes also represent a strong connection to the past. The ancient Maya definitely used such dyes in their weavings, and today's Maya weavers deeply appreciate the connection to tradition.