



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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FROM THE ANCIENT MAYA A DANCE HERITAGE

Rabinal Achi dancers.
Photo Anne Girard. 2006.

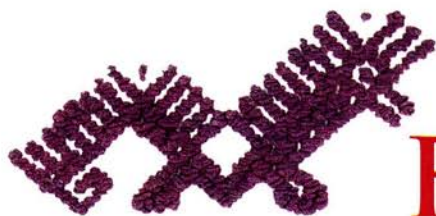
Every January 25, the town of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, comes together to perform a sacred dance drama called Rabinal Achi. The actors don elaborate costumes and masks and then dance out a complicated story that originated in the post-classical era of the ancient Maya (between 900 and 1524), went underground during the colonization of Guatemala, only to reappear when Spanish rule eased in 1856.

Last year UNESCO included Rabinal Achi as one of the world's unique folk traditions that were in danger of disappearing or deteriorating. The dance is an art form that "represents an outstanding example of the intangible cultural heritage

of humanity and testifies to the world's cultural diversity and richness."

Acting independently, the Ixchel Museum sent photographer Anne Girard to take images of this year's dance and sponsored two well-attended lectures on traditional dances by the anthropologist Carlos Rene Garcia Escobar. Mr. Escobar fears that international recognition of the dance drama might actually result in more harm than good. If it causes visitors to flock to Rabinal, the emphasis would soon change from the sacred to the economic; the dance drama would be trivialized, he said, if performed for tourists.

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FRIENDS OF IXCHEL

DONATIONS TO FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM

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.

Checks drawn to the name of Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc., may be mailed to:
Friends of the Ixchel Museum, Inc.
 Post Office Box 545
 Blue Bell, PA 19422

The annual meeting of Friends of the Ixchel Museum was held in Guatemala, March 3rd and 4th. The directors approved funding of several key museum projects. Among them: the translation into English of the symbols catalogue, continuation of the digitalization of the slide collection and slide restoration (an important project that needs your support), material for the children's program, and research for the upcoming embroidery exhibit.

Friends sponsored and Yolanda Alcorta curated an exhibit of huipiles from the Friends' collection titled "The Voice of Our Threads", held on February 25 in Washington D.C. at a VIP reception for the Muscular Dystrophy Association's annual gala event hosted by the Guatemalan Ambassador and his wife, Excelentísimo Señor Embajador Guillermo Castillo y su Distinguida Señora Flor de Castillo.

Sale of Pro-Teje textiles and products were hot at the Friends' booth during Maya Weekend at the University of Pennsylvania. The attractive woven products in natural cotton sold like hot tortillas. The weavings were transported from Guatemala by various members of Friends who worked with the Museum store.



Sunday at el Zapote. Susan de Riojas and Lucia Olivero.
Photo Holly Nottebohm. 2006.

FOIM members joined the Textile Museum in Washington D.C. to honor Jack Lenor Larsen last winter. Weaver Sabina Ramirez, wearing a smashing costume she designed herself, spoke on the future of Guatemalan weaving tradition.

The longtime treasurer of the Friends, Suzanne Davis, a font of good humor and common sense, has retired. Brilliant, hardworking, loyal, she will be greatly missed. Another key board member, Washington Post journalist Teri Shaw, has also resigned, citing work pressures. The good news is that Teri has agreed to finish translating our web page, which can be found (in Spanish) at www.museoixchel.org

EIGHT BEAUTIES BY ALFREDO GÁLVEZ SUÁREZ

Although he is not well known outside of Guatemala, inside the country Alfredo Gálvez Suárez (1899-1946) is recognized as an important artist. His most famous works are the large murals he painted in the Palacio Nacional exalting the history and culture of Guatemala. But his best works—the ones connoisseurs treasure—are his portraits of indigenous Maya and scenes of village life. Mostly in private hands, they smolder with feeling. Gálvez Suárez captures not only his subjects' likenesses but also their dignity and their pride in their identity—including in their costumes.



Adoración Pasual Abaj, Chichicastenango, 1938. Lithograph by Alfredo Gálvez Suárez.

Now, the Museo Ixchel owns a portfolio of eight lithographs by Alfredo Gálvez Suárez. The beautiful prints are the recent gift of Max and Sonia Holzheu and originally belonged to Max's mother. Depicting Indians in their costumes from Chichicastenango, Nahualá,

San Antonio Palopó, Sololá and other highland villages, they are on display until next March at the museum along with a Gálvez oil painting (on loan from the Museo de Arte Moderno), amid examples of garments that complement the art.

Alfredo Gálvez Suárez was born in Cobán, the capital of Alta Verapaz. A shy, introspective man, he went to art school first in Guatemala City, then won a scholarship to study in Mexico where he befriended the Guatemalan modernist Carlos Merida as well as Diego Rivera and the other Mexican muralists. Back in Guatemala, he often traveled in the countryside with fellow painter Humberto Garavito. He took black and white photographs of the indigenous people he admired so much, from which he would paint his haunting portraits.

In addition to the lithographs, the Museo Ixchel owns a number of other important art works, including the watercolors of Carmen L. Pettersen, the oil paintings of folk artists Andres Curruchich and Juan Sisay, and those of Hilary Arathoon. The common denominator in these varied works, of course, is the painters' fascination with native weaving. All these visual artists clearly were inspired by native textiles—further testimony to the originality and power of the weavings



THE MUSEUM



International Women's Day luncheon at the Museum.
Photo Monika Snodgrass. 2006

International Women's Day was celebrated March 8th with talks and a luncheon on the Plaza for the weavers who work with the museum and Pro-Teje. Vicenta Telón de Salazar, co-author of the book "Valores Maya", spoke about searching for excellence in life and work, and Isabel Muhyshond gave a seminar on self-esteem.

More than 250 people attended the museum's largest annual fundraiser at El Zapote, the beautifully landscaped farm of the Pettersen family on the slopes of the volcano Fuego. The family opens the finca once a year to benefit the Ixchel Museum.

An exhibition, "Voices from the North" was on view at the museum May 23 through 31, sponsored by the Canadian Embassy. The exhibit featured Inuit prints and an Inuit costume. The show focused on the achievement of James Houston, who went to West Baffin Island some fifty years ago and founded an artists colony in Cape Dorset. As a result, Inuit art—primarily block prints and sculpture—is now recognized as world class.

A new exhibit, entitled "Evoking past times through the eyes of Alfredo Gálvez Suárez" probes the subject of the connection between textile art and visual pictorial art. (See article, next page.)

As a means to fund future museum projects, the Ixchel is sending textiles and items made from textiles to the busy stores at the Dallas Museum of Art and the Lowe Museum in Miami. If the first shipments of samples sell well, this might become an ongoing project to benefit the museum.

Speaking of the Dallas Museum, Fabiana Flores de Saenz, Education Director and Violeta Gutiérrez de Cifuentes, the Ixchel Museum's collection registrar, traveled there in April to participate in "Indigenous Vestures and Weavings", an educational event for the exhibition "Lords of Creation: The Origins of the Sacred Maya Kingship". Violeta and Fabiana conducted workshops to help adults and children learn about traditional backstrap weaving techniques.

Alfredo Gálvez Suárez exhibit opens at the Ixchel Museum



International Women's Day luncheon at the Museum.
Photo Monika Snodgrass. 2006



Alguaciles of San Antonio Palopó, 1940.
Lithograph by Alfredo Gálvez Suárez.



FRIENDS OF THE IXCHEL MUSEUM, INC.

Post Office Box 545
Blue Bell, PA 19422

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Members of a women's cofradia,
Rabinal. Photo Anne Girard. 2006.

ANCIENT MAYA

Main article continued....

Rabinal Achi is the story of two princes, the Rabinal Achi and the K'iche Achi. After living for years under the dominion of the K'iche, the warriors of Rabinal rebel and their leader, the Rabinal Achi, captures the K'iche Achi. The prisoner requests the ceremonial drink of the Rabinal warriors, a last dance with Princess Kajyub and 260 days and nights to say goodbye to his countrymen. At the end of that time he is sacrificed by the eagle and jaguar warriors of the Rabinal Achi.

The story is acted out by 21 dancers: eight actors and their substitutes plus two young women and three musicians. Abstinence and prayer are required of the dancers. Making pilgrimages to the eleven hills around the town where their ancestors live, they request permission to perform the dance and hold their ancestors in respect and fear as they perform the four-act dance drama.

UNESCO describes the dance as a festival "coordinated by members of cofradias, local brotherhoods responsible for running ritual life in the community. By taking part in the dance, the living enter in contact with the dead, the rajawales, ancestors represented by masks. For the Achis of modern-day Rabinal, recalling their ancestors is not just about perpetuating the heritage of the past. It is also a vision of the future, since one day the living will join their ancestors."

