

THIS IS WHERE THE TRUE MEANINGS OF "FOLK" AND "ART" COME TOGETHER.



Leslie Clark

Right at this moment, somewhere in the world, men and women are painstakingly sewing, carving, painting, and polishing age-old traditional crafts, all with a singular destination in mind: the seventh annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, returning July 9 - 11, 2010. As much a spectacular experience as a market, the weekend event revels in the richness and diversity of folk art with world music, live performances, exotic foods, outbreaks of spontaneous dancing, the amazing eye-candy of seeing artists dressed in their best regalia and, this year, new events and workshops taking place the prior week. For some of these artists, it will be the first time in their lives they have left their village, flown on an airline or traveled to another country.

Most of us equate "folk art" with all those inevitable tourist souvenirs at the airport. But preconceptions vanish for the throngs of visitors who browse the brightly decorated, colorful booths lining both levels of Milner Plaza on Santa Fe's Museum Hill, overlooking a postcard vista of pine-clad mountains, and talk with or observe the artists demonstrating their handiwork. This is where the true meanings of "folk"

and "art" come together. Most artisans began learning their craft in childhood, their skills and techniques passed down through generations in the same family or community. Whether the finely wrought sterling Lao Loum jewelry from Laos, the strikingly contemporary-looking Tonga threshing baskets from Zambia, or the exquisite handmade white lace introduced by Portuguese settlers and made by the Xukuru women of Brazil, everything serves both a utilitarian and an aesthetic purpose. Like amulets, decorative motifs symbolize important protections, to ensure a bountiful crop or to keep away evil spirits. Since its inception, the market has been dedicated to preserving and perpetuating these complex living traditions, by bringing them the recognition and honor they deserve.

Everything must be authentic, made in the original materials and reflecting a tribal or cultural heritage. Folk art also reveals how, even in the most inaccessible corners of the globe, tastes and economic influences can evolve traditions. The drop-dead gorgeous handwoven wool textiles embroidered in vivid images of local flora and fauna from

THE 2008 SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART MARKET. *Photograph by a Polished Eye. Photographs by Judith Cooper Haden, except where noted; courtesy of the International Folk Art Market.*





VENEZUELAN BASKET WEAVER MAIGUALIDA EDITH MARTINEZ NUÑEZ of the Medawa Basket Cooperative demonstrates her technique.

LAKSHMI BAI MEGYAWAT of Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra in India works on her embroidered textiles. *Photograph by Schuyler Richardson.*

REINATA SADIMBA, potter from Mozambique, shows her skills. *Photograph by Bud Ellison.*

SAMBURU JEWELRY made by Rebecca Lolosoli of Kenya. *Photograph by Rebecca Lolosoli.*

Artesanias WARI-URPI in Peru, for example, have been in continuous daily use, worn as shawls by the Wari women, since the eighth century B.C. But today the indigenous artisans use aniline as well as vegetal dyes, from a passion for color, and make pillows and table runners as a means of selling their goods. Those adaptations dovetail with the market's ultimate goal, to create self-sustainability for the artists, so they can earn a year-round livelihood from practicing their crafts.

For the 2010 market, more than one hundred seventy artisans from over fifty countries across six continents were selected, more than half of them first-timers. For many, it takes months of effort and scores of volunteers working behind the scenes to bring them to Santa Fe. A loose worldwide network of people who know people who know artists communicates back and forth with regional co-coordinators who form a six-member Artists Selection Committee chaired by Dr. Suzanne Seriff, a folklorist and cultural anthropologist based in Austin, Texas.

“We find many traditional artists through peer word-of-mouth,” Seriff states, “like researchers doing field work in the areas, or companies or a non-profit that may have access to small villages. We call colleagues at universities and museums and experts around the country to see if they’re going abroad, and ask them to take applications with them.” Since the process requires so much information, the artists “need Western contacts,” Seriff says matter-of-factly. Artists can come on their own, but often a business or private dealer sponsors them for their first year, helping them with the English-language forms and photographs and funding their trip. Non-profits, foundations and UNESCO sponsor others.

The committee receives about four hundred applications a year, which the members divide up by region and evaluate according to a grading rubric. Then they all meet for a four-day session, during which the co-coordinators make their recommendations and every application is again individually reviewed, this time by the entire committee, and voted upon. Sometimes recommendations get voted down, as part of a

PAN YUZHEN of Minority People Textile Folk Artists Cooperative of Southwest China brought intricately embroidered textiles.

GUATEMALAN WEAVER SABINA RAMIEREZ. Her fabric will most likely be used for a *huipil*. Supported by the Friends of the Ixchel Museum.







INTRICATELY EMBROIDERED TEXTILE FROM MEXICO. *Photograph by Lisa Law.* ELIA CATALINA GUTIERREZ GARCIA, of the El Principe de Monte Alban cooperative of Mexico, greets an enthusiastic crowd.

HADEN OUSMANE MACINA, tenth generation Fulani jeweler from Mali. FORGED FULANI EARRINGS by artist Haden Ousmane Macina in gold and silver.

POK POP TOK WEAVING CENTER, Luang Prabang, Laos: one of the center's coop weavers at the loom. Their textiles had been in danger of vanishing. *Photograph by Jack Parsons.*

PERUVIAN COOPERATIVE ARTESANIAS WARI-URPI, showing members of this South American women's cooperative at work and detail of their intricately knitted piece with floral motif. *Photograph by Mabe Arce.*



larger strategy to balance out the kinds of art—ceramics, say, or jewelry—coming from different regions. Not surprisingly, “some of the most impoverished countries are our strongest sources of artists,” Seriff points out, “because the Peace Corps or cultural outreach organizations are already there. We have one volunteer who goes to remote nomadic settlements in Mongolia, for instance.” But over time market organizers have noticed traditional arts from places like Europe and Japan are missing. “We recognize now that there are parts of the world from which we get fewer applications,” Seriff says. They are developing a “fishing committee” of scholars, entrepreneurs and others who can focus on those areas to foster more contacts.

Two major new innovations come to the market this year. For the first time, in response to demand, the market will be open at a special ticket price on Friday night, July 9, for early buying with food, drinks and music. Second, the Museum of International Folk Art, in conjunction with the market, is inaugurating a Folk Art Week preceding the market, with events staged around Santa Fe. Folk Art Week debuts with a new museum exhibit, the Gallery of Conscience, opening July 4 through January 2, 2011, curated by Seriff (see first page of *Ornament News* this issue). The gallery each year will present a different perspective on the concept of rural women’s co-operatives, showing how they have profoundly empowered women, bringing stability and status. “You really get a window on seeing what affect your purchase is making on their world back home,” Seriff says. This year, two representatives from each of ten co-operatives selling in the market will hold a round-table discussion on the exhibit’s opening day. Future exhibits look at the issues threatening the survival of traditional crafts in developing countries, such as wars,

DETAIL OF HAITIAN VODOUN FLAG, using sequins sewn onto cloth, by Georges Valris. Photograph by Anne Pressoir.



MAASAI BEAD ARTIST AGNES PAPANITI and her husband Patrick made their first journey to the United States to participate in the market.

ecological change, population growth, and social pressures, and illustrates how some co-operatives have found solutions. The Gallery of Conscience artists will also take part in a series of public education programs sponsored by the museum during the week.

Folk Art Week rolls out entertainment as well as food for thought. TradiSon, a five-member Cuban band from Havana making their first trip to the United States, unleashes infectious Afro-Cuban rhythms in free concerts. Nicholas Kristof, a *New York Times* reporter and prize-winning author of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunities for Women Worldwide*, lectures at the Lensic Performing Arts Center. In the spirit of the Chinese adage, “Women hold up half the sky,” Kristof discusses how he and his reporter wife, Sheryl WuDunn, discovered that the way out of poverty in many countries comes from giving women the chance to earn an income, with China being the most formidable recent example.

Last year, in 2009, the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market made close to two million dollars in sales. “It’s the only market in the world where ninety percent of what they earn goes back to the individual or co-operative,” Seriff explains. Artists who normally make an income of two to three thousand dollars a year took home an average of just over fifteen thousand dollars. “We hear from them later that they’ve used the money to fund a health clinic, or to build a septic system, or they’ve hired a teacher and started a school in their community. It’s a testament to the market’s power that it benefits so many other lives.”