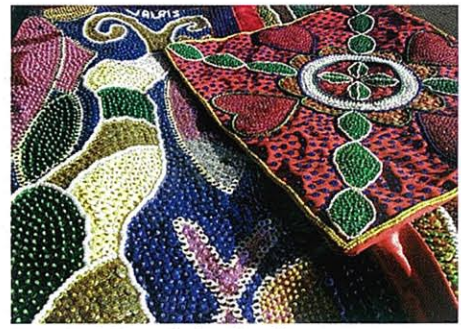




From Rwanda, papyrus baskets



From South Africa, a telephone-wire basket



From Haiti, beaded vodou flags

Handmade, heartfelt

DALLAS HAS A CRUSH ON THE SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART MARKET. WE KISS AND TELL.

BY CHRISTOPHER WYNN

Yes, one of Dallas' most fervently embraced New Mexico arts events involves shopping. We can also tell you that the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, held annually in July, goes much deeper than that.

Last year, real deep. A swift-moving thunderstorm threatened to drown out the opening ceremony for the mountaintop gathering of master folk artists from nearly 50 different countries. Rain came down sideways, lightning flashed and we saw at least one patron's spike heels sink in soggy ground. We gamely joined the crowds huddled beneath tents next to the Museum of International Folk Art on Santa Fe's Museum Hill. There we found Dallas bon vivant Michael Mullins looking damp but dapper, defiantly clutching his water-logged cocktail and calling out to us, "Welcome!"

Mullins, who for years produced the Dallas Market Center's annual Dallas Fashion Awards, is the 6-year-old Folk Market's newly christened "unofficial official director of ambience" — a title bestowed him by the event's founder, Judith Espinar, and board member Linda Marcus, who has maintained dual Dallas-Santa Fe residency since her marriage to the late Stanley Marcus.

On this evening, Mullins and crew presided over a colorful glob of rain-soaked paper flowers (if you can't change it, feature it), which formed an unexpectedly lovely backdrop for the event's kickoff — a procession of the artists Mullins accurately described as "Holy Week in Seville meets *The Lion King*."

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson made an introduction, then a parade of artisans in brightly colored native garb walked, shuffled or danced across the stage and into the crowd. At the end of the platform was Espinar, wet hair clinging to her forehead and voice hoarse as she leapt up and down, crying out joyfully: "Yea, Rwanda!" "Go, Indonesia!" "Welcome, Kandahar!" Other people stared, then chuckled and cheered along. Soon, we were all in tears. In a time of conflict, climate change and generalized anxiety, this was the power of art.

The market defines folk art as "a range of utilitarian and decorative media made by individuals whose creative skills convey their



The Sixth Annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market,

July 11-12, Milner Plaza, Museum Hill, Camino Lejo, Santa Fe, 505-476-1197, folkartmarket.org
 Tickets \$5 (Sunday only) to \$250 (admits two to preview party Friday, July 10, and includes Saturday early-bird entry)

community's authentic cultural identity," rather than a single artist's personal vision. The link to Santa Fe's famed Museum of International Folk Art is more cooperative (and geographic) than official, with board members typically joining independent folklore scholars in artist review and selection. This year's 165 artists (juried from 400 applicants) represent a quarter of the world's countries, from Afghanistan to Zaire.

More to the point, the market is the



Richard "Hank" Lee, market board member and owner of San Antonio's San Angel Gallery, brings in figurative clay sculptures from his Mexican artists.

largest of its kind, period. It also delivers some of the best warm fuzzies. Last year's event sold more than \$2 million of handcrafted pottery, textiles, woodcarvings, jewelry, beadwork, basketry, metalwork and countless other items that are either functional or pretty — usually both. Approximately 90 percent of the funds went home with the artists, fairly unheard of in the typical marketplace scenario.

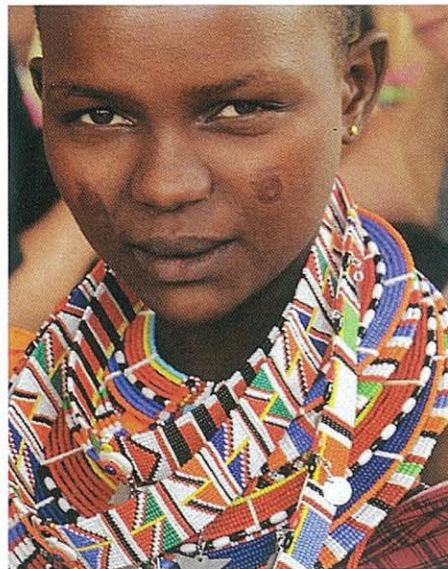
"We're helping to preserve cultures that have been speaking for generations through their art," says Espinar, warm and dry in Dallas on a recent visit. It's a language she knows well. A folk-art fanatic turned expert (credit her fateful post-college service in Peace Corps Peru), Espinar traded a pressure-cooker career in New York's fashion industry for a more nurturing existence as the owner of a Santa Fe global ceramics shop, which she ran for 16 years. That's when Espinar became even more intertwined in the lives and needs of the world's humblest craftspeople, eventually leading her to spearhead the first market in 2004.

This year's market is expected to attract 20,000 visitors. The traditional Friday night launch party promises to be the most dramatic yet, with decor Mullins describes as "Rajasthan meets Santa Fe. Or maybe Ganesh meets coyote." Translation: plenty of saffron and orange, assorted peacock and elephant prints, and "bejeweled and be-sequined" everything.

As for the weather, Mullins is optimistically forecasting "another gorgeous evening in the high desert" — though they're erecting an extra-large tent just in case. "All I can say is lightning better not strike twice."



Venezuelan basketry



Masai bead artist Agnes Papatiti



Lead-free pottery from Mexico

CULTURE CLUB

5 more ways to expand your horizon

SANTA FE OPERA

We love the contrast of velvet-curtained opera with the wide open skies of Santa Fe. See both **July 3-Aug. 29**, in a season that includes everything from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* to the world premiere of the Santa Fe Opera-commissioned *The Letter*, a noir-style production the opera sums up this way: "A hard-boiled dame cooks up her own little Singapore fling." Ticket, please.

505-986-5900, santafeopera.org

SANTA FE CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Get up close and personal with both established musicians and emerging talent over the six-week season, **July 19-Aug. 24**, which includes concerts, recitals, master classes, youth concerts and open rehearsals. Performance locations range from the historic St. Francis Auditorium and Lensic Performing Arts Center in Santa Fe to Albuquerque's KiMo Theatre.

888-221-9836, santafechambermusic.org

SPANISH MARKET

Revel in this 58-year-old celebration of the Hispanic culture of northern New Mexico, **July 25-26** on the Santa Fe Plaza. Leave plenty of space in your luggage to load up on handmade traditional crafts from more than 200 local artists. Admission is free.

spanishmarket.org

SANTA FE INDIAN MARKET

Sponsored by the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, the country's largest annual sale of Native American work can feel more akin to a rock festival, as hard-core collectors and museum agents



Fresh air: the Santa Fe Opera House

jockey for position before dawn on opening day. You'll see why when you peruse the traditional and contemporary Indian pottery, paintings, sculpture, woven baskets and jewelry for sale from more than 1,000 artists. The 88th annual event takes place **Aug. 22-23** in and around Santa Fe Plaza. Admission is free.

505-983-5220, swaia.org

S.O.F.A. WEST: SANTA FE SCULPTURE OBJECTS AND FUNCTIONAL ART FAIR

While the first Santa Fe edition of the four-day art expo took place in June, we'd advise booking ahead for next year's installment of this buzzy Chicago and New York import. On display this year? A collection of three-dimensional contemporary artworks (a curvy sofa made from 7,000 welded nickels, a chandelier of carved angels and demons in a clash of wills) from more than 35 top-tier international dealers. Enrich the mind as well as the eye with a bevy of lectures by artists, curators and collectors.

sofaexpo.com