



Egypt's pharaohs surely intended preservation when they built great pyramids and had themselves embalmed and buried with their golden ornaments and sacred pots. Their "remains" are awe-inspiring -- but unmistakably dead. Preserving a culture, especially an informal folk culture, means keeping it alive, singing the songs, telling the tales, weaving the cloth, throwing the pots, and passing along skills and traditions to the next generations.

At the Santa Fe Folk Art Market preservation is rightly joined with life. For two days in July (11 & 12, 2009) the high-desert light will shine down on master works of more than a hundred of the world's best folk artists. The market is the only one of its kind; a two-day explosion of life, a juried celebration of traditional artisans, their lives and their work, and a dramatic boost to their livelihoods. In 2008 sales amounted to more than two million dollars, an average of \$16,000 per booth, often the equivalent of a year's income in the home country. Making a decent living is the major factor in the survival of artisans and their work; demonstrating that a future is possible in craft encourages the next generation to continue in the field.

Serge Jolimeau, is perhaps the most famous individual "fer forgé" artist working today in Croix les Bouquets, a village of ironworkers in Haiti. A steady exhibitor in Santa Fe, his challenge is to make enough of his cut and hammered steel sculpture to satisfy the line-up of collectors that await him there. With the current collapse of Haiti's tourism industry, he would have few customers without his annual trek to New Mexico, where he is often sold out the first day, a success that has enabled him to finance his own participation at the market.

In its first years, the Folk Art Market chose only traditional Master Craftspeople but the jury found more and more applicants were groups of artisans, many of them large cooperatives, whose concerns were broader and more flexible than simply continuing tradition. Alive

to the global economy, they were adapting to markets, connected to the internet, ready for more education, for technical improvements, new materials, diversified agriculture, better health and living conditions.

Sna Jolobil is a large women's cooperative from Chiapas (800 members from twenty different communities, not all of them speaking the same language, not even Spanish). Sna Jolobil, familiar through the book, *Living Maya*, by its founders Walter Morris and Pedro Meza, continues to produce the intricate brocades of the Chiapas highlands using weaving techniques and motifs that go back hundreds of years. Many of the motifs are the same as those of the Mayan glyphs, With meanings mysterious to many years to anthropologists but, all along, well known to the women weavers.

In Zambia women have formed basket-making enterprises. One group traces its now traditional basket style back to Catholic nuns as recently as 1985. Another developed export capacity through Belgian international development experts. In 2003 yet another group, the Choma Museum & Crafts Centre Trust, worked with a designer from Aid to Artisans. Their "Tonga" baskets, shallow, sturdy and round are adaptable to almost any use from their own yam plots to Santa Fe's buffet tables. The women work outdoors, are paid by the piece, and use only low-tech simple blades to split the palm leaves, roots and vines. As a Belgian visitor wrote, "They don't have either water or electricity for more than half the day. Having no electricity, however, can bring people together ... people gather, sit around a fire, chant and chat." Still, Zambia is one of Africa's poorest countries where wages are less than

SUSTAINING TRADITION

\$2 a day but costs are as high as in Belgium (per Volens newsletter) and Tonga basket production is a welcome opportunity.

Another large, regional association, CACSA, the Central Asia Artisan Support Association, was formed in the 1990s when Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan became independent of the former Soviet Union. Linked previously by the Russian language and a controlled economy, hundreds of craftspeople had suddenly to learn how to survive. Learning to market their crafts was shockingly new, but intent on re-establishing their own cultures, the Kyrgyz group turned to wool felt and their nomadic tradition of yurts and sirdak pieced felt rugs while the Uzbeks re-emphasized silk ikat weaving, embroidery and their unique glazed ceramics. Bukhara, in

Uzbekistan, a Sister City to Santa Fe, shares a sisterly affinity in its climate, crafts, spices and architecture.

Santa Fe is a UNESCO designated Creative City, a hotspot for art even without the Folk Art Market, with its Spanish Market, Indian Market, and dozens of fine art galleries as well as abundant turquoise & silver for local art collectors and thousands of visitors. The Folk Art Market brings its tents, music and crafts to Milner Plaza, where it's surrounded by museums, Native American, Spanish, and International and is sponsored by the city, the state, by UNESCO, by foundations and numerous individuals. With ongoing music and dance performances the Folk Art Market is a festival unlike any other.

INSPIRED RETAILING

Text & images: Clare Brett Smith

Above:
Making baskets in Zambia.
Below:
A finished Tonga-style basket, available at ABC Carpet and Home, www.abchome.com

