



Oaxaca Times

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Free

La Guelaguetza

They come from all corners of the State of Oaxaca to the hill at El Fortín: Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Popolocas, Triques, Chontales, Chinantecs, Izozacas, Mixes and members of other ethnic groups. Their festive clothing make a multicolored tapestry on the slopes of the hill. And this is a festive day. But it's not any old holiday; we're talking about Guelaguetza, an ancient ritual practiced by the ancestors of the people who come to El Fortín. Guelaguetza, in the Zapotec language means "mutual aid" or "offering," and represents high social consciousness since it involves giving one's fellows the product of one's labor and artistic efforts.

Guelaguetza or Monday of Cerro (Hill) is celebrated in the foothills of El Fortín in the city of Oaxaca, on the two Mondays following the 18th of July - the anniversary of the death of Benito Juárez. Today it is the state's most important folklore event. In attendance the celebration are representatives of Oaxaca's seven regions: the sierra, the Ravine, Tlaxiaco or Papaloapan, the Mixtec region, the coast, the Isthmus and the Valleys-who present local authorities and distinguished guests



Picture by Manuel Benito Cardenas Garcia

with gifts or offering coffee and hats from the Coast; totopos (crispy tortilla pieces) from the Isthmus; palm-leaf place mats from Huajuapam de Leon in the Mixtec region; mezcal from the valleys... But their biggest gift is artistic: with unparalleled enthusiasm they perform dances and songs from each of their regions.

tec god of corn, both ethnic groups organized a festival in which they paid homage to their divinities in dances and songs, executed with art and skill.

“When the Spaniards arrived, they tried to suppress these pagan rites; but it was no easy task convincing the Indians to abandon them. They continued gathering on the slopes of the hill.”

The origins of this festival are to be found in pre-Hispanic times. The Zapotecs and Mixtecs-who were distinguished by their heroism in battle-performed a yearly celebration in honor of a supreme god (creator of all things) as well as other deities such as Zaagui (the Mixtec god of rain and fertility) and Pitao Cozobi (the Zapo-

In 1495 the Zapotecs and Mixtecs were conquered by the Aztecs. Nevertheless, their rituals did not die out but instead gained importance, since the Aztecs adopted as their own deities Centéotl (god of agriculture) and Xilonen (goddess of the new corn), making their own offerings to these gods in the form of

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"Spirits" to Visit Casa de Cultura

This month, the Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña welcomes California artist, Joan Gollub, whose "Spirits on the Scene" exhibit opens on July 6 at 8:00 PM. Her oil paintings, oil pastels and masks promise new perspectives on the time honored Oaxacan theme of intermingling worlds. All art lovers are welcome to the reception on July 6. The show will run until July 31.

Joan Gollub, known in the United States for her dream-like renderings in various media, combines saturated colors with careful line technique. Her latest collection includes works inspired by her stay in Oaxaca during "Days of the Dead."

"The intense colors of the flowers I saw everywhere reminded me how much I enjoyed painting still lifes as a child," she commented. Gollub began painting at the age of six under the direction of the French Impressionist, Samuel Markitante. Later, she graduated California In-



"Harmonious Sister with small household objects" Acrylic, texture on canvas by Joan Gollub

stitute of the Arts. Today, besides painting, she teaches art where her two sons attend elementary school in the desert town of Pear Blossom.

Joan Gollub, sister of children's author, Matthew, felt at home in Oaxaca since her first visit last year. "When I paint," she explains, "I often feel the presence of those I've loved who are now dead. Being in Oaxaca for Days of the Dead helped

me realize that these sensations were normal. Now I am at peace with them and able to give them voice."

"Spirits on the Scene" is part of an on-going effort to bring foreign artists and techniques to the Oaxacan art community. The show is sponsored by the Government of the State, the Institute of Oaxacan Cultures as well as the Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña which welcomes you. ♦

Are you looking for tapetes ?

by Sarah Johnson

When traveling to a place as charming and picturesque as Oaxaca, most tourists go home with an extra suitcase filled with souvenirs. The street vendors, stores near the Zocalo and the market place offer a broad selection of Oaxaca's famous wood figurines, black pottery Mitla-inspired jewelry and beautiful woolen rugs.

But with so many choices, there is always confusion over where to get the best buys in the city. The rugs, known as tapetes, can be purchased in the United States at marked up prices. The bargains in Oaxaca and the broad selection in designs, sizes and colors are always tempting to visitors.

Whether you go to the countryside, small shops or the market place, the key to finding the best prices for authentic wool rugs is bartering. My search for the perfect tapete for my apartment in Chicago began with a 15-minute car ride outside the city. A friend and I went to a shop called The Ancient Zapotec on Carretera T. del

Valle. I bought a mid-sized pastel colored rug for N\$160 — without any bartering. The shrewd shopkeepers near the Zocalo tend to start at higher prices. At one store a woman was asking for N\$450 for mid-sized rugs. However, with some bartering we were able to find rugs ranging from N\$150 - N\$200.

Eager to make her first sale of the day, the owner of a shop on Alcala Street offered two mid-sized rugs for N\$300. We decided to hold off and check the prices at the markets, like the Market of the Artisans, at the corner of Zaragoza and JP Garcia streets. Surprisingly, that's where we found the best prices.

Aggressive store vendors immediately approached us. My friend kept telling the salespeople he was only looking, but eventually a sale was made after much bartering. The vendor refused to tell us how much he was asking, what we were willing to pay. The rug was bigger than the

one I bought, but my friend ended up paying N\$120, down from the average price of N\$180.

With a faltering economy, many sales people are willing to barter quite low — any sale is better than no sale. Foreign-based chains, such as the food store Giant and McDonalds, are imposing new competitors that are taking money away from smaller shopkeepers.

Even bargains like these help bring in money to pay for labor, rent and upkeep of smaller shops. If you're willing to barter, you will be able to take home some of the original artistic works found only in Oaxaca. ♦

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La Guelaguetza...

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ings, dances and festivals in the eight months of their calendar, which was led by Ney tecuilhuhuitl. The Aztec's activities merged with those of the Mexacan peoples, and thus began the early celebration of a great festival in honor of the goddess Xilonen, bringing together the valley's important personages at Daninayaolani hill (known today as El Fortin).

When the Spaniards arrived, they tried to suppress these pagan rites; but it was no easy task convincing the natives to abandon them. They continued gathering on the slopes of the hill. In 1700 Carmelite missionaries decided to build a church on the site where the natives celebrated their festivals, attempting to replace these rituals with Christian rites in honor of the Virgin of Carmen on the 16th and 17th of July.

But from the first of these "new" celebrations, the Indians, after paying tribute to the God of their evangelizers, took to the streets in a veritable masquerade. They danced to the beat of the teponaxtli (Indian percussion instrument) as one hundred young men, some dressed as Span-

iards and others as Indians, marched in a parade, followed by La Tarasca - a huge, fantastic papier-maché serpent. Things went on this way every year until 1741, when bishop Tomas Montaña decreed, "because of the fear inspired by the serpent," that it be replaced by mammoth puppets representing the races of humanity. These "giants," as they were called, appeared for the last time in 1882.

For fifty years the festival on the hill was reduced to a simple fair with an infinite variety of local foods and snacks. But in 1930, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the proclamation of the city of Oaxaca, an attempt was made to revitalize the fiesta, organizing first the festival dancers from all seven regions of the state of Oaxaca. While the date of the celebration has changed, the state government of Oaxaca has continued its efforts to promote it.

During the presidency of Luis Echeverria an open auditorium was built on the slopes of El Fortin, and that is where the festival is now held. It begins with the choosing of the

young lady who will play the part of Centecoihuatl (the goddess of corn); a female representative of each region, dressed in regional costume, gives a speech - sometimes with the aid of a translator - about her area, and a jury elects the most "authentic" of the representatives. In the dancing plaza near the Iglesia de la Virgen de la Soledad (Church of the Virgin of Solitude), the history of Guelaguetza is presented: the Zapotec, Aztec and Hispanic eras through which the celebration has passed. Then comes the parade of the marmotas (giant paper dolls), the dragon, the zancudos - which dance on stilts as much as six feet high. Last but not least are the dances and songs of each of the seven regions. The festivities are capped off with a fireworks display.

Today, tourists from around the world come to the festival of Guelaguetza. Nevertheless, the dancers and singers continue to maintain the mysticism of their traditions, and in their dark smiling faces one can see the tenderness, gentleness and wisdom of the peoples. *Written by Mary Lou Dabdoub.* ♦

Ask W-ed:

Dear W-ed,
I am a student in Oaxaca living in an apartment. My problem is that I discovered an *scorpion* (scorpion) on the wall above my head one morning when I woke up. What can I do about these deadly looking creatures?

Dear Monique,
Give it to your favorite Spanish teacher as a gift.

If you wish to ask W-ed any questions, just send a letter or a postcard to:
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- ✓ "XIPE" 315-A 5 de Mayo St. Phone: 91 (951) 6-36-98
- ✓ "TERE" 6th St. of Hidalgo Ave. "W" Phone: 91 (951) 6-42-05
- ✓ "La Joyeria" Perez Gasga Ave. corner with Marina Nacional. Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca. Phone: 91 (958) 2-05-30

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- "Rio" 722 Bustamante Street Phone # 6-4788