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Mano de Obra 2006 Awards



Mano de Obra celebrated its second Award Ceremony on April 22, confirming that it has become Oaxaca's most important literary contest. Hector Huerga, coordinator of the project, conducted the ceremony held in the Andres Henestrosa Library.

In this, it's second edition, the contest affirmed its national projection by receiving more than 90 entries from 17 different states around the country. Nationally, there are only a few short story contests and not all of them, despite having support from important institutions, publish a compilation with the winning stories.

Fifteen stories were selected to be published in the second edition of Mano de Obra-Relatos Breves. The first, second and third places were granted a monetary prize as well.

This year's winners were: third place, from Oaxaca, Askari Mateos, with for *Cuarenta Grados* a story about migration from Oaxaca to the United States; second place, from Puerto Vallarta, Francisco Hagenbeck, with *En Campaña*, a story of an old school politician's bodyguard; the first place was for Cristina Michaus, from Mexico City for *¿Ya Vistes?*, the story of two little girls who live in a garbage dump.

The rest of the winners were: Flor de María Romero Sánchez (Mexico City) for

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Learn Spanish at the ICC: Oaxaca's Best Language School

5 de Mayo

In 1862, given Mexico's inability to pay its enormous foreign debt as an excuse, thousands of French troops attacked the port of Veracruz. France thus invaded Mexico and replaced democratically elected President Benito Juárez with Austrian emperor Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg.

But on May 5, 1862, en route to Mexico City, the French army encountered strong resistance in Puebla, at the forts of Loreto and Guadalupe. Led by Mexican Generals Ignacio Zaragoza and Porfirio Díaz, a small, poorly-armed militia managed to stop and defeat 6,000 French soldiers.

Although the victory was short-lived—

the French ruled Mexico until 1867—the success is engraved in Mexico's collective memory as a symbol of freedom, bravery, and patriotism.

May 5, *Cinco de Mayo*, is now a national holiday, celebrated throughout the country, especially in the state of Puebla where marchers dressed as French and Mexican generals and soldiers fill the streets and participate in a mock battle, with roaring cannons and rifles.

Surprisingly, *Cinco de Mayo* festivities are often larger in the United States, in cities with a sizeable Mexican population, than in Mexico. The holiday, whose historical significance has mostly been forgot-

ten, has become a celebration of Mexican culture, food, and music, with many schools using it to teach Mexican history and customs. Commercial interests have also successfully promoted the holiday, marketing products and services related to Mexico. In fact, *Cinco de Mayo* has now become one of the largest beer consumption holidays in the U.S.

Whether the reason be historical, cultural, or just an excuse to party, each year *Cinco de Mayo* seems to become incorporated into the holiday calendar of more and more people.

By Sarah Sacks-Irvine



Mural of the former Government Palace of Oaxaca (now the Science and Technology Museum) depicting Juárez, Zaragoza and other men from the Reforma period.

¿Which School?

Estimado ICC,

I just wanted to write and thank everyone at the ICC for my wonderful stay in Oaxaca last month. To my great surprise, even four weeks of classes prepared me really well for the rest of my travels through Latin America. The handouts I received during the course have been really useful (might I even say invaluable!) and it's so great to be able to communicate with the people over here. Maestro Victor's vocabulary training has set me up to get the gist of what's going on in most situations, especially in the markets!

I've been in touch with my host family – I'm missing Señora Tico's *mole* like crazy and look forward to returning home and trying my hand at all the fantastic Mexican recipes Conchita taught me at the ICC cooking school.

Please give Nancy and Gregorio my best and tell them that I've been prac-

tising my salsa steps without the need to drink copious amounts of alcohol. I'm confident now so when the latino boys ask me to dance I no longer have to say no or down a few prerequisite beers.

I'm planning on returning back home via Oaxaca so I was wondering if I could return to the school just for a one-week intensive course at, dare I say it, intermediate level.

I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Muchas gracias otra vez,
Julia Fisher



ICC Dance



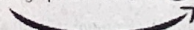
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The Amazing Tehuantepec

Fighting male domination

A visitor to Oaxaca is often amazed at the variety of ethnic populations coexisting in a relatively small region and impressed by the tenacity with which they've kept their traditions and languages alive.

One of the most remarkable of Oaxaca's 16 ethnic populations stands out because it is run by women - directly against the grain of Mexican machismo. These people occupy the south coast of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico's narrow waist between the Pacific and the Gulf, and are called Tehuantepecans.

Visitors lucky enough to be in Oaxaca in April and May have a chance to see manifestations of this unique culture, especially in the *velas*, or festivals, for which they are justly famous.

Mexico has always been quite conservative in social mores and customs; and the people of Tehuantepec are not much different in that respect. But within that context, Tehuantepecans are Mexico's "liberated women".

While the men stay close to home and tend to many domestic chores, the women of Tehuantepec are out taking care of business, running the affairs of the town, and trading in distant markets. In other Oaxacan communities, the young men are mobile, often leav-

ing to seek work elsewhere. The young women are encouraged to stay home. In Tehuantepec, it's just the opposite.

Another unique feature of Tehuantepecan culture is an open acceptance

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of homosexuality. One of the meanings of Mexican machismo is that in this country there is no gay rights movement, no gay pride, and no tolerance for gay lifestyles. But in Tehuantepec gay men are not only tolerated, but perhaps even celebrated. A mother may 'show off' her gay son to others, and gay men in female clothing are not an unusual sight on the streets.

The women of Tehuantepec are assertive, take charge types, used to getting what they want. If a girl of courtable age has her eye on a man,

the common belief is that he doesn't have a chance against her wiles, her charms, or even her magic potions. For that reason, many women of Oaxaca are loathe to see their husbands visit the region on business.

Many Tehuantepecan women are accomplished entrepreneurs. In April and May, mangos hit the markets of Oaxaca, brought from Tehuantepec and sold in abundance. If you see an ethnic woman in the marketplace who seems to be more self-assured, who sits or occasions "like a man," one leg up on the other, and if she pleasantly cajoles you into buying something, chances are she's from Tehuantepec.

The openness and warmth of Tehuantepecans affects life in many ways. For example, in the Mexican countryside, if a boy seduces a girl and the drops her, it's a serious matter, and he had better watch his back. In Tehuantepec, he can get off with a modest fine negotiated between the two sets of parents.

The most impressive spectacle of Tehuantepecan life that an outsider can witness is the *vela*, a festival held to honor a saint, a hero, or a harvest. No one plans a *vela* more seriously



Tehuana.

Photo by: Tina Modotti, Courtesy of Fondazione Italiana per la Fotografia



Tehuana dancer in the Plaza de la Danza in Oaxaca City

than Tehuantepecans, and no one has more fun once its under way. Velas are so called after the candles lit in the church in a ceremony which initiates the festivities. After the ceremony comes the procession, and then an all-night party of eating, drinking, dancing, and celebrating, in which the whole town participates. The procession is a wonder to behold. Ox drawn wagons are beautifully arranged with trees and flowers, and look like rolling gardens. From them young women throw treats to the crowd. The procession, and indeed every detail of the entire vela, is directed by the gushána, a sort of religious sorority invested with the responsibility of carrying on the traditions of the vela and doing it right. These women, pillars of the community, are prominently featured in the procession. They wear long, full dresses of dark velvet meticulously embroidered with bold floral designs making one can take years. They carry baskets of fruits and sweets on their heads symbols of the bounty their way of life and their hard work provide. And around their necks are layers of gold jewelry, symbols of wealth that escape the bank vault only on these rare occasions.

The vela is carefully planned by the gushána starting a year ahead of time. One member is chosen to be the mayordomo, or director, for that year. Being mayordomo is a coveted privilege and an awesome responsibility. She is expected to pay many expenses out of pocket, and it's not unusual for her to spend the equivalent of 15 000 US dollars.

The vela culminates in an all-night potluck fiesta. To gather the crowd, a band strikes up at the house of the mayordomo, and then proceeds to the houses of each of the other members of the gushána, where friends and relatives have gathered to await their turn. Everyone contributes something special - shrimp tamales, say- and a few cases of

beer. After a night of dancing and merrymaking, the band strikes up again for the last time, and escorts everyone back to the home where they began.

The origins of the unique traditions of Tehuantepec are lost in the past. Like the rest of Mexico, they're a mix of conquest and indigenous cultures. But it's evident that the matriarchal aspects of Tehuantepec tradition may be closely tied to an ethnic group called the Huaves, concentrated in several small towns in the area, unrelated ethnically to the Zapotecs, having arrived, some think, from either Peru or Nicaragua shortly before the

conquest.

To witness the velas of Tehuantepec one must go off the beaten tourist path a bit. But in turn, it's not that far to the Isthmus, and well worth the adventure.

If you care for to experience an incredible time in one Vela you have to visit Juchitan from the 18 to 25 of May. The people is very helpful you just have to ask at your hotel desk or in the offices of the Major of the city of Juchitan they will tell you about the events.

By Yolanda García Caballero



Frida Kahlo is one of the most, if not the most, famous Mexican women. Even those who are not art connoisseurs immediately recognize her paintings and her features; many of her canvases are devoted to herself. Through self-portrait she undertook a permanent quest for herself. Having suffered an accident at a young age, Kahlo felt a sort of incompleteness, an internal disintegration that had a tangible expression in her inner organs, but also had a spiritual nature. Kahlo was also a model of the woman of the future. Her libertarian ideas were criticized, especially outside the artistic lore where she belonged. Here, in a self-portrait dressed as a Tehuana Kahlo craves to embody all the strength and endurance of the women of the Isthmus.