

Guanajuato's Folk Art

An enormous variety of symbols,
signs and wonders express the creativity of Guanajuato.

The ingenuity and workmanship of the artists of both town and country
make the folk art of Guanajuato one of the most diversified and genuine in all of Mexico.



PRE-HISPANIC

In Guanajuato, the production of objects both useful and artistic has an unparalleled precedent: the ceramics of Chupicuaro (A.D. 900 to 1500), distinguished by the perfection of their burnished clay and a diversity of forms and colors. The ability to process the clay and decorate it was very developed in what is now Guanajuato since before the arrival of the conquistadors. Objects of carved stone are graceful because of the solidness of their forms. Plant fibers, age-old raw materials for folk art, are still used today. Agave fiber, cane and reeds, among others, are woven into baskets used for everything from transporting seed to holding bread at traditional festivals.

Note: All quotes taken from the catalogue for the exhibition "Folk Art in Guanajuato; An Overview into Our History", Museo del Pueblo de Guanajuato (Guanajuato City: Instituto Estatal de Cultura, 2001).

Photos reproduced courtesy of the Guanajuato State Cultural Institute.



EUROPEAN - ARABIC

The Spanish conquest brought new raw materials and techniques to craft production in the region. Both the original designs and those from Europe and the Orient underwent changes because of the intensive mixing of the races that molded our culture. Over three centuries of colonial life, wool, vitreous ceramics and cut-paper decorations became idiosyncratic substances and forms integral to our identity.



MAGICAL AND RELIGIOUS

Magical and religious feelings are one of the most deeply rooted sources of expression. The perception of the transcendental is perpetuated in a cyclical view of the world in an intense calendar of festivities. This pious practice is not without its joyful vision of existence; the mixture can be seen in a great number of objects destined to express the eternal questions about the mysteries of life and death.

DAILY LIFE

Before the advent of the empire of technology and industrial production, each piece had a significance that transcended its original, strictly utilitarian value. Cooking utensils, clothing, ornaments and religious objects all fulfilled the purpose for which they had been created and at the same time gave their owners the on-going enjoyment of the beauty of their manufacture, making them unique pieces whose grace and delicacy often meant they were lovingly preserved from generation to generation.



FANTASTIC AND PLAYFUL

Heir both to the world view inextricably intertwined with death that characterized the pre-Hispanic cultures and to the variegated symbols and forms of the Spanish baroque,

Guanajuato's fantastic art is characterized by the ominous appearance of its creatures born of fears and nightmares in which, however, a trace of irony can always be detected.

By contrast, papier-mâché dolls, piñatas, the sweet pieces of candy made of *alfeñique* paste and wooden or tin toys systematically take us all back to the limbo of childhood, where a flight of fancy always points to the future.



UNDER THE SIGN OF FREEDOM

When the time came to rise up against Spanish domination, one of the most decided groups to join the independence movement were the craftsmen. The potters from Dolores and other parts of the state immediately and from then on began to include in their work motifs alluding to independence.



MODERN TIMES

The arrival of modernity in Guanajuato was not sufficient to eradicate the taste for beautiful, traditional household items. Craftsmen have concerned themselves with introducing novel techniques and materials in making the objects that preserve traditional forms and uses; one example is high-temperature fired ceramics. At the same time, new designs have been developed using traditional techniques and materials, such as in the case of stippled brass or wood carving.

