

## ¡Viva México! Clothing and Culture review Joe Lewis

¡Viva México! Clothing and Culture May 9, 2015 to May 23, 2016  
 Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume Royal Ontario Museum 100 Queen's Park, Toronto,  
 ON M5S 2C6

There are memories and references to a bygone and living culture in the atmosphere. A soundtrack, celebratory, haunting and invigorating music evoked by the dancing colour of still cloth and costumes. It is a Fiesta, a celebration of stitch, of weave, action and of colour. Guest Curator Chloë Sayer is a leading authority on Mexican textiles and culture. She has brought together costumes and textiles dating from 1725 to the present that are representative of post conquest colonial Mexico. An evolution of weaving textiles traditions reinventing the ancestral symbolic motifs of traditional back strap weaving and adding European embroidered embellishment techniques of the colonizers and their immigrants into the new nation's repertoire of skills China poblana ensemble exico, 1932 (1)

Weaving and embroidery are equally in play with in the context of this exhibition, Catholic priests introduce the technique of embroidery early after conquest along with converting the indigenous population. The ROM has a charming collection of needle work samplers dating from 1725 through to the end of the 1800s. There is stunning Rebozo (shawl) 1775-1800 which brings weaving and embroidery together this extremely rare Rebozo, woven on a backstrap loom with a cotton warp and silk weft finished with a six point fringe. It is richly embroidered. Figures engaged in scenes of courtship, marriage, and warfare. According to the museum information these narrative designs were likely influenced by embroidered textiles made for export in China and the Philippines, which had a profound effect on Mexican needlework during this period. Rebozo (shawl) 1775-1800 Mexico cotton and silk tabby embroidered with silk and silver filé in arning, satin and rope stitch (2) Click on this image to see an extreme Close up

In the selection of woven materials you can witness the changes and adaptations of indigenous symbols into Catholic or merely to decorative (to an uninformed eye) and see apparel which combines pre-conquest styles of dress and the fashion of the conquerors. European capes become back strap woven Sarape (blanket /wrap) which gets adapted to Pictorial sarape Gobelin (high warp tapestry) woven wall hanging going from garment to decoration. These changes are interestingly shown in two Sarapes. (blanket /wrap)

Man's classic-period Saltillo-style sarape (detail) (3)

The first: Man's classic-period Saltillo-style sarape (Natural dye wool weft and cotton warp woven in tapestry technique Mexico, 1860-1899. This piece shows a change from functional to symbolic with the addition of a central medallion, evoking the blanket which carried the roses the Virgin of Guadalupe ordered a Christian convert to deliver to the Bishop as a sign that he should build a church in her honour. When opened the roses spilt to the ground revealing an image of the virgin imprinted on the blanket. This according to legend\*1. Pictorial sarape with riders on horseback Wool, tapestry woven on treadle loom. Mexico 1940-1960 (4)

The second: Pictorial sarape with riders on horseback as the center rather than the medallion, (Wool, tapestry woven on treadle loom. Mexico 1940-1960), this second celebrates the golden age of Mexican cinema. The protagonist, seen on horseback are thought to be Jorge Negrete (1911-53) and Marla Felix (1914-2002) it offers a romanticized vision of rural life on the great Hacienda (rural estates) In this modern world this second one seems a rather fun & "tacky" souvenir piece in comparison with the incredible geometric patterning of the first.

While looking at the displays might be satisfying one of the benefits of the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and Costume are the cabinet drawers which house smaller pieces that enrich and inform the exhibitions as a whole. In the drawers beneath the displays of weaving you will find many woven accessories. There is an exceptional example of contemporary work woven in a yarn as fine as sewing thread. The Gomez Sash (Woman's waist-sash) woven by Crispina Navarro Gómez is extremely impressive. This sash of cotton with warp-faced patterning and a fringe of worry doll tassels has an array of flora and fauna moving across the length of the sash showing a dexterity of hand bringing centuries of technical skill that is stunningly alive. Crispina and her sister Margarita Navarro Gómez from Oaxaca, Mexico gave demonstrations traditional back strap weaving at the ROM during the opening weeks of the exhibition.

To experience this exhibition is to experience joy. Any preconceived assumptions of a primitive indigenous culture, corrupted by its European subjugator and on the verge of dying are challenged by this exhibition. The skills of indigenous weavers was far from primitive with a multi-level of symbolic iconography created with complex weave structures that incorporates and absorbs the Christian iconography while moving forward through European fashion trends as they occur. This thoughtful and beautiful presentation covers over 300 years of evolution and continuation of an ongoing living art that is lively and exciting to see.

notes \*1 Saltillo Sarapes: A Survey: 1850&ndash;1920, Winter, Mark and McCormick, Thomas, 112 pages with 50 illustrations and 57 color plates, McCormick Gallery and TMG Projects 835 W. Washington Boulevard Chicago, Illinois 60607 Published in an edition of only 500 copies Library of Congress Control Number: 2011923609 ISBN 0-9671013-8-

notes on photographs All photos by Brian Boyle and provided by The Royal Ontario Museum

1, China poblana ensemble

Mexico, 1932

Cotton, silk embroidered blouse and skirt are augmented by a straw, cotton, and silk hat and wool and leather shoes.

963.24 A - E

Gift of Luisa Reynes Gisbert 2 Rebozo (shawl) 1775-1800 Mexico, cotton and silk tabby embroidered with silk and silver filè in darning, satin and rope stitch

This extremely rare rebozo, woven on a backstrap loom with a six point fringe, is richly embroidered. Figures engaged in scenes of courtship, marriage, and warfare. These narrative designs were likely influenced by embroidered textiles made for export in China and the Philippines, which had a profound effect on Mexican needlework during this period. 3. Man&rsquo;s classic-period Saltillo-style sarape (detail)

Natural dye wool weft and cotton warp woven in tapestry technique

Mexico, 1860-1899

2002.19.12

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. W. Kent Newcomb.

Certified Canadian Cultural Property/Bien culturel canadien attesté

4. Pictorial sarape with riders on horseback

Wool, tapestry woven on treadle loom.

Mexico 1940-1960

2015.11.1

This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust. 5. Woman's waist-sash (detail)

Crispina Navarro Gómez (b. 1963)

Cotton with warp-faced patterning

Santo Tomás Jalieza, Oaxaca State, 2014

2014.25.1

This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Kircheis Family Endowment Fund.