

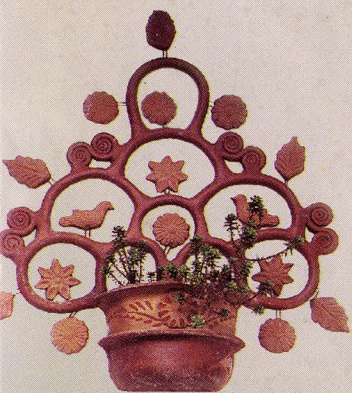


Arte popular mexicano al

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Mexico's craft industry plays a major role in conveying the colourful, unique and vital image associated with that country.

This thriving industry is supported by effective structures for the promotion and marketing of crafts which are solidly based on a rich artistic heritage.



Craft products reveal information about the traditions as well as the creative and aesthetic sensibilities of specific groups or nations. In our day, craft products have become important also as a means of earning hard currency, whether it be nationally or internationally, benefitting artisans and nations and impacting directly on society and the economy. Through crafts, a group of people is able to project and/or search for a specific image/identity that sets it apart from others. Mexico is a country which successfully generates a particularly identifiable image of colourful vitality, which is solidly based on its rich artistic heritage.

The arrival of the Conquistadors in Mexico in 1519 brought Spanish culture in contact with that of the indigenous peoples, and over the past five centuries a unique melding of cultures has taken place. Codices written by early Spanish chroniclers enumerating tributes paid by subservient groups to the Aztec empire, give detailed descriptions of the wealth of handicrafts produced by the Indians. Pre-Columbian examples of craft objects testify to a long tradition of excellence in craftsmanship. The chroniclers consistently express their amazement at the richness, colour and variety of the craftsmanship they encountered.

The conquest brought about great changes in the lives of the indigenous peoples. The subjects of the Aztec ruler Moctezuma became subjects of an unknown Emperor, in whose name Cortes destroyed their idols and continued to extract the same tribute as had the Aztec rulers before him. Mexican craftsmanship adjusted to new influences and norms, some traditions disappearing whilst others endured through the centuries.

While traditional crafts have not always commanded the respect they are afforded in Mexico today, nationalistic movements, enthusiastic collectors and influential artists like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo helped foster an appreciation of home-grown craft objects. Hard economic circumstances also forced people to fall back on their ingenuity.



The global boom in tourism and subsequently created market for souvenirs and craft articles has seen the expansion of the craft industry all over the world.

Mexico, astute in recognising these potentials, has succeeded in developing effective structures through which the production and marketing of crafts are promoted. Out of a population of eighty million, it is estimated that up to five million are directly or indirectly involved in the crafts sector. Not only are endeavours privately funded, but the Government has since 1961 actively been involved in support of the crafts sector, mainly through the establishment of FONART.



WHAT IS FONART?

FONART is an acronym for Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (National

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Trust for the Development of Arts and Crafts), and is a Federal Government agency.

FONART as such came into being in 1974. Its forerunner was the National Co-operative Development Bank (Banco Nacional de Fomento Cooperativo), which was established by the Government in 1961. Since 1988 Fonart has been run by the National Council for Culture and the Arts.

OBJECTIVES OF FONART

The main objectives of FONART are to stimulate the production of national arts and crafts; to rescue certain techniques from extinction, thereby securing the preservation of craft traditions; and to elevate the quality of the objects produced and the income levels of the producers.

These general objectives may further be broken down into five goals or specific objectives, based on the founding contract:

1. Securing a better income for the artisans of Mexico.

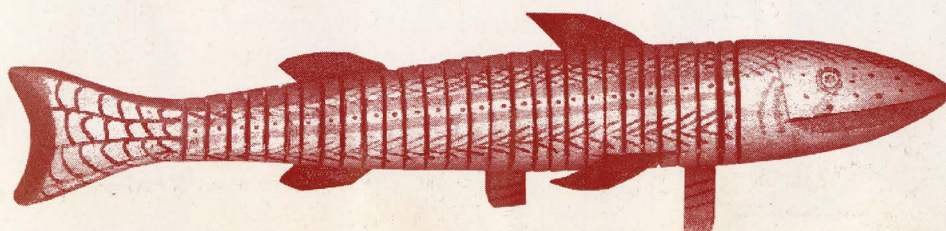
2. The acquisition of craft products directly from the producers.
3. The marketing (direct and indirect) of such craft products.
4. The promotion of the artistic sense of the Mexican craft product.
5. The provision of credit to the artisans, as well as any technical and administrative assistance which may be required.

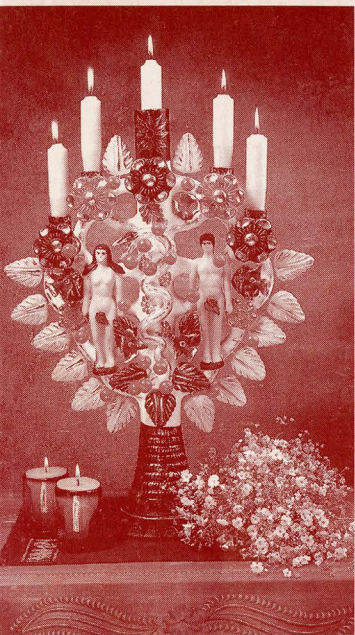
These objectives are accomplished through a structured programme of financial, technical and marketing support and services.

SERVICES RENDERED BY FONART

In order to achieve its goals and objectives, FONART provides the following services:

- The direct acquisition at a just and fair price of the crafts on offer as long as the products are always authentic traditional craft products.
- The marketing at national and international level of merchandise purchased from the artisans, through a system of shops located throughout the country, as well as through a Foreign Trade Office.
- Extension of credit to those artisans who conform to the policies and requirements of the foundation, assisting them in the attainment of their objectives.
- Furnishing technical advice to artisans in all areas including production and design.
- The organisation of regional and national competitions for specific or general crafts.
- The organisation of temporary exhibitions in FONART or other galleries.





- The diffusion of cultural and artistic values inherent in popular art through the print and electronic media, as well as through direct communication such as conferences, etc.
- Presence at national and international fairs with work that is representative of popular Mexican art.

SYSTEM OF ACQUISITIONS

Merchandise is acquired at prices which not only absorb the initial material costs, but also take into account time and labour invested, as well as current economic conditions.

The acquisitions made by FONART have demanded the development of a strategy which allows the possibility of buying in the majority of geographical areas in the country and from the existing ethnic groups. This makes for the fortunate situation in which articles subsequently on offer are truly representative of the whole country. The buying system is structured around five storage facilities strategically placed in the main craft areas.

An itinerant programme entitled 'Craft Routes' enables accredited technical staff to visit out of the way areas and make purchases directly in craft communities. Articles are sometimes taken on consignment, the producer being paid when the article is sold. Artificially created 'craft centres' as such do not exist in Mexico. Certain towns are famous for the production of certain items, and craft traditions are handed down in families. Even with FONART support, regions still produce the same kind of objects that they traditionally did. For instance Metepec, a town in the state of Mexico, is immediately associated

with a specific kind of pottery, while Santa Clara del Cobre is famous for its metalwork. Tourists are drawn to these towns specifically because of the crafts to be found there.

MARKETING/TRADE NETWORK

The crafts acquired directly from producers must necessarily be traded or sold. To this purpose FONART uses a network of ten shops or sales centres situated throughout the country, six of which are situated in the capital. For their part, the FONART shops are authentic museums of living popular art, offering the visitor an incredible selection of objects in pottery, textiles, metalwork, lapidary and stonecutting arts, cordwork, jewellery, leather goods, glass, lacquerware, wood, masks, furniture, figurines, musical instruments, paper and paper mâché, bone, horn and tortoiseshell, sea shells, seeds,

beads, featherwork and more. While prices tend to be at the high end of the scale, quality is always good.

At international level, use is made of an international trade office which deals with foreign requests and their eventual shipment abroad. This office is also responsible for selecting craft items for participation in international fairs and exhibitions.

The marketing network ensures that the public is purchasing the genuine and the most representative craft articles of the highest standard that the country has to offer. Money earned from the sale of these goods is used to defray costs incurred to run the organisation, and to strengthen its financial basis to assure excellence.

TECHNICAL ADVICE

During the course of FONART's history different types of aid have been given to craft workers, extending from the actual production to the pricing of work, as well as administration and other organisational aspects. At present there is an emphasis on the evolution of new designs in keeping with the natural evolutionary process of the specific tradition. This is done in order to make the product more competitive in the national and international markets. Experts are employed by FONART to this end. FONART produces guide books, suggesting the manufacture of certain objects which have a good potential market, and giving specific measurements, design and decoration ideas.





PRESERVATION, ENHANCEMENT OF ARTISTIC QUALITY AND DIFFUSION OF INFORMATION

Arts and crafts competitions, be they general or specific, state-bound or national, constitute an optimal alternative for preserving techniques which are in danger of dying out, as well as giving impetus to artistic creativity and excellence.

FONART draws up a calendar of competitions and exhibitions every year, programming events according to local priorities and aiming to strike a balance between objectives of artistic promotion and the preservation of a culture/technique. Recently, the various state governing bodies have played a major role in the logistical organisation of competitions in their areas. The participation of the private sector through patronage and prizes has increased interest and the number of entries in these competitions.

The exhibitions in their actual form are not limited to plastic objects, but are forums of multiple expression, where round-table discussions, book presentations and direct sales to galleries take place.

In order to successfully promote and sell Mexican crafts, various strategies are employed:

Folders, informative brochures, calendars

and bookmarks are printed. Use is made of radio and the press. Audiovisual programs are used at exhibitions, courses, seminars, conferences and all cultural events in which FONART participates. To promote sales abroad, FONART participates every year, whether directly or through representatives, at various international crafts fairs. At the national level participation is at various events and fairs, where special exhibitions are mounted and recognition is given in various ways to the most distinguished artists.

GOVERNING BODY

The highest governing body of FONART is made up of representatives of the directorate and of various Government agencies which represent all sectors directly or indirectly related to the activities of FONART. This body is structured to guarantee an integrated administration in all aspects - economic as well as in the field of ethnic, artistic and cultural development.

Unifying organisations and experiences from different bodies directly benefits the directorate of the foundation, while the responsibility for such a body is shared. This is particularly important when the programme in question is one of national importance with implications for social order, the economy, and the artistic sense of the nation.

FONART is a thriving institution. Its capacity for change and adaptation has led to growth and consolidation, with the final aim always being the stimulation and protection of the crafts of Mexico. Through FONART, Mexico has succeeded in coordinating the necessary natural,

technical and human resources to establish and maintain an effective body to aid its craftspeople.

South Africa, in this era of sweeping change, melding of cultures, search for a visual identity, and difficult economic times could truly benefit from looking at the Mexican example. Time has come for Government and the private sector to work together and actively support our crafts industry.

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