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*Introduction:  
Traditional Arts and Changing  
Markets in Middle America\**

*June Nash*

Artisans are producing traditional craft objects for a growing world market of travellers and, increasingly, those who shop at home through catalogue retailers. The objects are a medium of communication between people who live profoundly different lives but who can respond to the symbols, textures, and forms that express distinct cultural traditions. The

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flow of goods from the industrial centers of the world to the colonies in earlier centuries is now met by a reverse flow as consumers seek the exotic and unique objects of handicraft production in Third World countries. This has given birth, as Jane Schneider (1987) has pointed out, to new forms chosen and redesigned to fit the world view of the receivers. Many of the consumers want to know more about the way of life of the people who make these objects, and producers are curious about those who purchase their goods. This book is an attempt to answer some of the questions they may ask.

The articles are by anthropologists who have studied the production and marketing of crafts by indigenous people in the area known as Middle America that stretches from the central plateau of Mexico to Honduras and Costa Rica. Before the European discovery of America, these people shared a common tradition derived from the Olmec civilization that flourished in the coastal Gulf of Mexico region over three thousand years ago. The ritual calendar based on thirteen months of twenty days, and solar calendar of 365 days, the four-path way symbolized in the foliated cross, the elusive feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl, and other beliefs symbolized in paintings, pottery, and stone carvings indicate the intercourse and trade that linked the people who created and spread this early tradition from the coastal areas to the Yucatán Peninsula, the high plateaus of the interior, and southern mountainous areas of Mexico and Guatemala. (Gossen 1986).

The crafts made by contemporary representatives of the distinct Maya, Zapotec, and Nahuatl groups preserve techniques and art traditions over a thousand years old. The textiles, pottery, and metal work whose high quality astounded the Spaniards when they arrived in Mexico persisted in many areas where they were made for daily use. The simple technology, including the backstrap loom and hand-coiled pottery with open-hearth firing, kept the cost of production so low that these goods could compete with manufactured articles introduced during the colonial and independence periods. Household production of crafts complemented the semi-subsistence small plot farming that ensured year-round employment of family members.

These surface manifestations of continuity have deep cultural roots that continually generate responses to change. In the *Popul Vuh*, often called the Bible of the Quiche speaking migrants into the western highlands of Guatemala, we learn that creation for the Maya was an experimental work of craftspeople, not the design of an all-powerful god. In Dennis Tedlock's translation (1985), the creation myth accounts for how the "Grandmother, Grandfather" Xpiyacoc Xmucane, with the help of



*Figure 1. Pottery similar to that found in pre-conquest site in Amatenango del Valle is shown in a contemporary Chiapas artisan exhibit.*

their twin sons, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, the “Maker, Modler,” brought forth life on earth. Their first attempts were not successful, and so they tried again. “So then comes the building and working with earth and mud,” it is related (Tedlock 1985:79). “They made a body, but it didn’t look good to them. It was just separating, just crumbling, just loosening, just softening, just disintegrating, and just dissolving. Its head wouldn’t turn, either. Its face was just lopsided, its face was just twisted. It couldn’t look around. It talked at first, but senselessly. It was quickly dissolving in the water.” The “Mason and Sculptor” put his creation aside in disgust, saying, “It can’t walk and it can’t multiply, so let it be merely a thought.” After speaking with each other, the Bearer, begetter and Maker, Modler brought their “manikins, woodcarvings” into being, able to talk and to multiply, yet they still lacked “legs and arms, blood and lymph, sweat and fat, and their faces were dry and crusty, until the maker modeler gave them a heart.”

These oral traditions are still alive in the area today, along with the crafts that inspired them. In 1964 when I was doing field work in Amatenango del Valle, a pottery-making village thirty-seven miles from the department capital of Chiapas on the Pan American Highway, I heard the

same creation myth from an old man. Human beings, he told me, were made of *lum*, clay or soil. The first attempt was not well formed, just as some pots do not come out well. It had only one foot and one hand and could not stand or work. In two successive tries the mother and father of us all improved their creation, adding a heart and genitals and teaching it to make the milpa and to eat corn tortillas.

When I returned to Amatenango twenty-five years later, I wanted to check the story with that in the Popul Vuh, but the old man had died and so I talked to his daughter, now in her sixties and a master potter. She told me that after the first trial when the figure could not stand or walk, the ancestors broke it, as one would crumble a badly formed pot. On the second attempt it did not have genitals nor an anus, and so it could not multiply or eat. Again the ancestors broke their creation. On the last attempt it was well formed but could not live until the creators gave it a little corn and showed it how to plant, then how to cook and eat their food. Then the ancestors said, "Now it is good."

For these Mayan inheritors of the ancient Middle American traditions, creation is not the omniscient act of an all-powerful god as in the Christian-Judaic tradition. Like the craft process of trial and reworking, the father and mother of us all shape and reform their creation, trying it out at each stage, continually improving upon their model until it functions well. This creative process remains central to artisan production even as craft workers respond to changing markets.

Where production is still tied to the household unit and skills are transmitted from mother to daughter or father to son, there is greater continuity in traditions than in capitalized production. In the production of traditional crafts, households reproduce themselves in an ongoing tradition. Pottery in Amatenango del Valle is still produced using the coil technique and open-hearth firing, and products are similar to those excavated in the late pre-conquest site near the present center. Designs used by contemporary weavers of Tenejapa replicate those found in stelae at Yaxchilán on the Guatemala-Mexico border (Morris 1984). In producing the distinctive woven and brocaded blouses, the weavers transmit an identification of themselves and their families as indigenous people.

Continuity in social traditions is ensured in craft production. Under the tutelage of their mothers and later mothers-in-law, girls find their place within the family. As skilled potters and weavers, women have contributed to the family income in a way that has become essential for the survival of small-plot cultivation in the growing cash economy. Husbands and fathers bring in wood for firing pottery, or assist in the pasturing and sheering of sheep for wool in weaving villages. They often market the



*Figure 2. Daughter in Amatenango del Valle household with three potters specializes in doves for tourists.*



*Figure 3. Magdalena Arias (left) addresses women of the cooperative awaiting a delegation of the Partido Revolución Institucionalizado (PRI) in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico.*

products, thereby controlling the revenues and ensuring the persistence of patriarchal peasant families. The value of continuity is stressed in prayer where ritual practitioners constantly reassure each other that they are doing things as the ancestors did, here “in the eyes of the ancestors” (Nash 1985).

While production processes have remained remarkably constant throughout the colonial period and up to the present, the commercialization and exchange of goods have changed considerably. With men increasingly forced to work as wage laborers, often on distant commercial plantations, women frequently go themselves to the towns and cities to sell their goods. Inflationary costs of raw materials and transportation add to the pressure on artisans as they try to price their products at rates that will allow them to continue in production. In an attempt to assist these women, the Mexican government has sponsored cooperatives both for the purchase of raw materials and for the sale of artisan products through the National Indian Institute (INI). Women have gained greater autonomy and a political role in leadership positions in these organiza-



*Figure 4. Mother of Mexican President Salinas Gortari (center) helps promote indigenous crafts in her visit with the cooperative led by Magdalena Arias during the presidential campaign in 1989.*

tions. This has threatened the patriarchal structure of the family as they expand their contacts throughout the region. The lengthy betrothal suits initiated by parents are now often avoided by young couples who use their own earnings to elope and set up independent households. Some women choose not to marry, supporting themselves and often their parents and younger siblings, or their own children born out of wedlock, with earnings from sale of their crafts (Collier 1990; Eber and Rosenbaum, Nash this volume).

The contributors to this volume explore the differential impact of these changes at the local level within this changing regional pattern. The experience of the Maya in Guatemala differs considerably from that of the Maya in Chiapas and Yucatán. In Guatemala the military attacks on the Indians combined with Protestant conversion discourage identification with a distinctively Indian tradition (Annis 1987; Carlsen, Verrillo and Earle, and Ehlers, this volume). The distinctive woven and brocaded products of Guatemala have found ready entry to the United States market, with tie-dyed textiles selling in department stores, in street bazaars,





*Figure 5. Children learn weaving in Ministry of Public Education classes in Venustiano Carranza taught by indigenous weavers.*

and through catalogues such as “Pueblo to People” or “The Peruvian Connection,” but the production of clothing that identifies people as members of a particular community is each day further reduced. By purchasing these articles, even without travelling to find them, consumers are enjoined to enter into an adventurous expedition to the regions from which they come. Even more, they can contribute to the work for social justice, as the catalogue “Jubilee Crafts” announces, by buying the crafts made by oppressed peoples.

In contrast to the strategies private commercial interests have used to promote international markets for Guatemalan crafts, Mexican government agencies have developed a tourist market within their borders through exhibitions in museums and competitions that cultivate existing skills and expand the marketability of products. Although the actual capital invested is low, government programs in Chiapas have cultivated an awareness of the indigenous skills still practiced in contemporary villages (Nash, this volume). In Oaxaca, where the development of tourist-oriented production of textiles and pottery was developed more than two decades ago, the government promotes an ethnic identity related to craft products sold in national museum outlets and bazaars sponsored by





*Figure 6. Magdalena weavers sort skeins in one of Sna Jolobil cooperatives.*

regional artisan institutes (Cook 1984, García Canclini 1982, Novelo 1976, Stephen this volume, Waterbury 1989). Paradoxically, as the sale of these traditional blouses and other products formerly worn by the indigenous women increases, the actual use by the artisans declines (Carlsen and Stephen, this volume; Waterbury 1989).

The relations involved in artisan production vary, in accord with Novelo's (1976) conception of the sphere of activity, from family production in the household to wage work in capitalized shops where the owner and/or members of the family continue to work on production, to shops using wage labor only. The unaccounted work of women and children in the household enables incipient entrepreneurs to amass capital to expand the operation and ultimately exploit the labor of others. The common characterization of objects called "artisan products" is the high level of manual labor and correspondingly low level of capital investment in machinery and automatic controls (Cook, this volume).

The intrinsic value of crafts to the sophisticated traveller or catalogue consumer is precisely the human labor embodied in the product and what it tells about a whole way of life. In contrast to industrial production, with the minutely subdivided tasks defined by engineers and controlled by managers remote from the work process, artisan production still links conception with execution. The traditions of the society that produces the craftspeople inhere in the form and function of the objects. The search for singularity, in itself a byproduct of a society in which most goods and services are commoditized (Kopytoff 1986), is satisfied in the acquisition of unique objects from such societies.

Yet artisans are not unaffected by the market forces that inspire much of their production. Feedback, based on sales or promotional agents, regarding the popularity of certain items or designs inevitably influences future production. This can be either positive or negative, depending on the channels of communication. An intelligent awareness of the real costs in labor time and raw materials would help avoid the debasement of crafts that often occurs with exposure to tourist markets. Quality control initiated by intermediaries can cultivate appreciation of consumer tastes and artisan skills that promote the level of production. Culturally sensitive agents in such an exchange process have often succeeded in revitalizing lost techniques such as vegetable dyes that were used before the introduction of synthetic dyes, or hand-spun yarns instead of factory-produced skeins. In this volume, Gobi Stromberg-Pellizzi shows the tenuous connection between craftsperson and consumer in her case study of Taxco silversmiths. The pressures exerted by highly competitive international markets can destroy the qualities that attracted the custom-



*Figure 7. San Juan Chamula women knit while they sell products in the local market.*

ers initially. She contrasts the resistance to this kind of debasement by weavers of the cooperative Sna Jolobil to the situation she found in Taxco. Inspired by Walter Morris, who did research on the designs and techniques involved in the textiles (1984), the cooperative Sna Jolobil, now directed by the son of one of the Tenejapa weavers Pedro Mesa Mesa promotes traditional techniques and designs that were in danger of being debased as these crafts were commoditized in the growing tourist market that came late to the state of Chiapas.

Even with the expansion in national and international markets, few artisans have benefited from the greater returns. Again the exception can be found in the cooperative Sna Jolobil. By opening a collector-oriented market for backstrap loom textiles, Morris was able to find a clientele willing to pay a price that took into account the hours, weeks, and even months required for producing each item.

Yet even in the protected environment of a cooperative with enlightened leadership, the women have not asserted control over the profits nor taken as active a role in decision making as the organization allows. This is a result of socialization within patriarchal structures that encourages women to assign leadership roles to men. They are also warned by incidents such as the murder of the female cooperative leader in Amatenango



*Figure 8. Chamula shopkeepers sell Guatemalan textiles with their own products in street market of San Juan Chamula.*

del Valle described in Nash's contribution to this volume that any assertion of autonomy will be punished.

The commercialization of artisan production bridges the contrasts in gift giving and commoditized exchange that are often posed as polar opposites (Appadurai 1986; Hart 1982). Tourism epitomizes the newly monetized yet culturally embedded encounters that characterize the value of these exchanges as the culture of the artisans is packaged along with the product. Tourists are called upon to learn about the producers, and their curiosity often exceeds the information provided in the guide books as they intrude into the sites of production. Artisans resist some of the intrusion, particularly that of photographing them as they work. But even this has become commoditized as weavers or potters demand a thousand pesos for a shot, or add the favor of posing for a shot if the tourist will buy their wares. Some towns, like San Juan Chamula, have created stalls in municipal markets where women sell their own crafts along with those made in other towns. Civic officials may even sell permits for tourists to enter the churches or take photographs in public arenas. By commoditizing the relationship with the visitors, the indigenous people have overcome



*Figure 9. Brocaded huipiles of Tenejapa have just recently entered the market.*

the hostility that has often resulted in assault and even the killing of intruders in the past. But this process may indeed involve a renewed colonization as these semisubsistence farmers become ever more dependent on distant markets and the vagaries of economic cycles over which they have no control. As Gesheker (1978:70) warned, "Tourism is an extremely competitive industry and promoting it within the framework of international capitalism involves selling a country as a product."

In the dozens of indigenous communities surrounding the provincial city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in the state of Chiapas, visitors can find the entire gamut of commercialization that Bourdieu (1977) defines as the commodity status of artisan production. Some of the items have been produced for market for centuries, such as the pottery of Amatenango del Valle. Other items, such as the brocaded *huipiles* of Tenejapa, have just moved into commoditized exchange within the memory of living weavers. A master weaver seventy years of age who spoke only Tzeltal told us about how she ventured into the city of Las Casas to sell a pair of woven trousers twenty-five years ago. She described how she was so fearful of her encounters with merchants that she sold work that involved



*Figure 10. Manuela Guzman, Coordinator of Artisan Production Cooperative of Instituto Nacional Indigenista, examines backstrap loom textiles from her native village of Oxchuk, Chiapas.*

several weeks of labor for the price of a handful of fruit. Some of the textiles woven by women of her town replicate designs that can be seen in the robes of Maya figurines on stelae that are dated at a thousand years (Morris 1984). In other towns such as Aguacatenango, commoditization of the embroidery work that was utilized in making women's own blouses

occurred within the last three decades. The colonial designs of realistic flowers that these women embroidered on their blouses have recently been augmented by designs introduced by dealers from the United States and Canada.

Oaxaca artisans have been involved in commodity production for several centuries. Waterbury (1989) speculates that the embroidery craft was probably introduced by Dominican friars during the colonial period. Its growth was sparked by the post-World-War-II tourist trade in the 1950s. Other more mundane crafts such as grinding stones and mats, discussed by Cook (this volume) precede the conquest. The government began to sponsor these indigenous crafts over two decades ago, promoting the ethnic identity of the producers. Building on these images, importers extoll their “2000-year-old heritage . . . as deep and fertile as the Oaxacan valley of southern Mexico where the Zapotec Indians have woven a culture from the fibers of their own strong roots dyed with influences from the Mayans, Aztecs, the colonial Spanish and more recently the modern world as it spins towards the 21st century” (cited in Stephen this volume).

Stephen goes on to show the contradictions that result from the interactions of these producers with the growing international market. Zapotec weavers protect their local traditions in opposition to the commoditized version of “Indian” culture promoted by the state. This has enabled them to retain some control over the production and distribution of their distinctive products in international trade circuits. Class distinctions noted by Cook in Oaxaca communities are further corroborated in Stephen’s study, showing how these complicate the attempt to maintain autochthonous traditions. Yet relations of production are still mediated through ties of kin and *compadrazgo*, (ritual godparenthood), often providing the basis for reciprocal labor networks, used at fiestas, that define and reinforce a sense of common identity.

Stephen also shows how the state’s active intervention transformed the local economy from subsistence-based activities to wage work for men and commoditization of women’s crafts as far back as the 1920s. Migration in the *bracero* program to the United States allowed some men to accumulate enough capital to expand commercialization of artisan production when they returned. The completion of the Pan-American Highway stimulated the market potential of the area. At the very point in time when synthetic textiles were being adopted locally, the government promotion of artisanry for tourists encouraged the revitalization of this dying enterprise.

Contradictory trends in the development process in Oaxaca result in the producer’s ethnic identities being contested as communities fight for



their share of the market in international spheres. With whatever remains of traditional arts and culture, Zapotec weavers can exert greater control over the markets they enter than the Taxco silversmiths described by Gobi Stromberg-Pellizzi. The cheapening of production processes and the intense competition among silversmiths have not as yet been countered by the development of internal organization to set prices and maintain quality of artisan products. The vulnerability of the producers to a volatile market reduces many of them to the role of pieceworkers in a putting-out system that enriches the intermediaries at the expense of the producers.

The wide range of differences in production processes among the brickmakers and weavers Cook studied in Oaxaca is reflected in distinct levels of consciousness. Yet even in the smallest shops he discovered capitalist production relations. The accumulation of capital goes on in the small shops as the owners reinvest capital to further production. This can increase productivity, especially when the owner pays piece rates in order to maximize the extraction of surplus value, paving the way to increased wealth distinctions. As workers become conscious of the disproportionate gains of merchants and producers, the growing class differentiation can lead to conflict within the community.

These case studies from Oaxaca and the central plateau indicate a more advanced process of commercialization of crafts than in Chiapas where market exchange for textiles is relatively recent. In the indigenous communities of Chiapas, domestic relations of production are transformed by commoditization. Eber and Rosenbaum in this volume show the conflicts experienced by weavers of Chamula and Chenalho as they try to balance the need for cash against the negative reaction of their husbands and the wider community to their entry into the market. Both authors found that men particularly resented the women's involvement in the politics of the cooperatives. This parallels the response of men in Amatenango to women's direct access to these new political arenas.

Nash's longitudinal study of pottery in Amatenango del Valle in Chiapas reveals the impact of an intensified pottery production on the domestic economy. Commoditization of this craft in Amatenango del Valle occurred probably even before the conquest. What is novel in the present enlarged sphere of exchange is the growing contribution that women make to household economy with the cash earned by the sale of pottery, and their greater sense of autonomy within the household. Men contribute an ever-larger share of labor in pottery production because of its increasing importance, bringing in most of the wood for firing and assisting in the collection of clay, a task men never engaged in during the 1960s when I had last done field work in the town.

The persistence of small plot, semi-subsistence household production supplemented by artisan production is a cultural preference that cannot be explained in economic terms alone. Commercialization of traditional arts in San Antonio and Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala makes it possible for men to remain in their homes and avoid the arduous trips to work in coastal *fincas*. In addition, a compelling dynamic holding together an economic unit such as the household is the high level of satisfaction for men accustomed to a dominant position within the indigenous family and community. In Amatenango, the control by men of the sales of pottery enabled them to take advantage of the cash earned by women in pottery production to further their own investments in cattle, horses, and—more recently—the purchase of trucks. Yet the unequal return has already sown rebellion as women choose to live alone in the village or even escape to the city. The domestic violence documented by Eber and Rosenbaum in Chamula and Chenalhó as men try to reinforce their control over women within the domestic unit is paralled by the murder of the president of the Amatenango cooperative.

Tracy Ehlers' article delineates a new model of artisan development in the San Antonio Palopó township where weaving sales to tourists have enabled the population to abandon migratory plantation labor and improve standards of living. The direct sale of products to the U.S. market, bypassing the local and regional intermediaries who formerly dominated the market, enables the weavers to command higher prices and to hold on to more of the proceeds. Yet the production for use that formerly motivated household activity is being subverted by the very gains from expansion of commodity sales as the importation of new ideas and goods subverts the wearing of the indigenous garments.

The high stakes, both in terms of potential profits and community loss, of drawing the traditions of these Maya communities into national and even international markets, is nowhere clearer than in Guatemala. Robert Carlsen's article on textile production in Santiago Atitlán shows the international implications of craft production in this hub of tourist trade in the lake area. In the use of dyes he teaches us to read the changing world fortunes that affect Guatemalan Indian craftspeople. As World War II expanded from the European theater to Asia, the scarcity of German dyes was followed by the scarcity of silk. The military repression of the current decade is marked by a shift from cotton to cheaper acrylic yarns. The Mayans, as Carlsen succinctly states, have made the changes necessary for staying the same. Here again the production for use is in transition to production for sale in ways that respond to shrinking land and expanding markets for craft goods. Ethnic identity expressed in the continued use

of locally woven garments has both fortuitous as well as culturally constrained bases. It acts as an integrative mechanism preventing the centrifugal tendencies that threaten cultural disintegration. By entering into the new circuits of commoditization while drawing inspiration from the achievements of the past, the artisans have achieved in some cases new creative syntheses.

Sol Tax captured the ingenuity of these entrepreneurial artisans many years ago in this monograph *Penny Capitalism* (1950). He illustrated this in class with the story of a Panajacheleño weaver-entrepreneur who had sold him and his wife Gertrude so many pieces that they had no need or desire left, but he continued to return with offerings, each time pegged so much lower in price that they felt forced to take advantage of the offer. Finally Sol asked the man how he could sell at a price so much reduced from the first items he had sold. The man told him to bring those earlier sale items out, and then he pointed out the progressive reduction in size and complexity of design that made the lower price possible.

Four decades later Tracy Ehlers has discovered the same eager response to ever-more-distant markets as artisans adapt their weaving talents to the production of belts, bags, and a variety of garments that have found markets as well as imitators throughout the world. In the town of San Antonio where she studied weaving in the 1970s, she saw the inception of a weaving cooperative started by a Peace Corp volunteer and returned to find it actively operating with several other lines in 1989. Although the returns to the producers were low and only a few of the entrepreneurs gained uncommon wealth, the income enabled these farmers to avoid contracting out their labor in the coastal plantations.

Duncan Earle and Erica Verrillo in their article examine two groups of Mayas displaced by the violence against indigenous populations carried out by the military. The authors have promoted a craft project enabling refugees in exile camps in Chiapas to survive in an environment where their entry into the agricultural labor force encounters the opposition of Mexican Indians. Across the border a development project for Maya widows, which incorporates a craft component as a by-product of sheep and goat pastoralism introduced in 1985, ensures survival of women and children whose husbands or fathers have been killed or who live in exile. They find that these low-cost, grass roots development projects sensitive to the skills of women and cultural proclivities of the population provide an important transition away from the politics of terrorism and the economics of despair let loose by the military. Yet the low returns to women compared with those who traffic these commodities in government and

private export enterprises perpetuate the exploitation characteristic of Ladino/Indian relations.

The relationship between art, politics, and the social system explored in all the papers is focused in the setting of museums in Flora Kaplan's paper. She elucidates the formation of national identity in Mexico through exhibits and shops that promote the sale of craft work. The validation of both authenticity and aesthetic qualities receives the final seal of approval in these circles, contributing to the rise in prices as well as the promotion of sales.

As the art forms of these indigenous cultures still possessing distinctive traditions pass into metropolitan centers of the world, the vulnerability of the creator to new pressures in this wider context is evident, yet the survival of these art forms may require entry into international circuits. In Guatemala, Mayan communities respond to dictates of the export market in finding new sources of cash to survive in the new national economy. Those who have gone into exile in Mexico have even less choice in defining their products. Nonetheless the wearing of a proper costume "puts one in the form of one's ancestors," as Carlsen notes in his article, and by maintaining their craft the producers retain an important part of



*Figure 11. Lacandon woodcraft, the most recent craft introduced into museum shops, combines traditional objects—wooden bowls and spoons—with new sculptural forms and even clocks.*

their identity. In Oaxaca, Zapotec artisans are subsidized by the government to commoditize their culture, yet they seek to preserve an autochthonous identity distinct from the commercialized entity. The communities of Chiapas, which entered the commercialized tourist world decades after those in Oaxaca, relive the past in each task that they undertake. In Amatenango del Valle each prayer intoned in rituals reiterates "And so we shall be able to do what our mothers did and what our fathers did here where our Holy Father sees us and our Holy Mother sees us," (Nash 1985:xv). The artisan potter or weaver may continue to be the agent, along with the museum exhibitors and collectors who make their enterprise viable, in transmitting the program of the ancestors.

Whether they will reaffirm those traditions, ensuring that the culture has not strayed from the path set down at the beginning of time by the ancestors, will depend on the nature of the relationship existing among the artisans, the intermediaries, and the consumers. The "alternative" trading organizations represented by Pueblo to People or Jubilee Crafts, and publicly or privately subsidized cooperatives, may assure a non-exploitative basis for this relationship. In this postmodern world of amalgamated cultures and the search for identity through consumerism, the strange alliance of a politically conscious consuming elite and culturally rooted producing communities may continue to generate new and beautiful forms and textures in artisan products.

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