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Textile Artist Introduces Rug Hooking to Mayan Artisans **Wisconsin artist teaches workshops in the Guatemalan highlands**

30MAY11: Panajachel, Guatemala

Textile artist Mary Anne Wise volunteered to teach rug hooking workshops to Indigenous Maya women in partnership with Oxlajuj B'atz' and everyone is pleased with the results.

Oxlajuj B'atz' invited four of their 20 member cooperatives to learn how to make rugs from rags. The organization had agreed to cover all travel costs and to provide food and lodging.

After being elected from among more than 500 members, twenty-eight women and one man arrived at the first workshop. They came in small groups - all eager and hungry after tough traveling. Some had nursing babies and older kids in tow. All would learn over several days a very useful new method of recycling any cloth. This is a good use for their brilliant textiles, and more materials are easily accessible from the local second-hand clothing stores.

The workshops could have been complicated by language differences: The impoverished and more than 80% illiterate people from the Highlands may speak one of several Mayan dialects but the workshop students understood just a little Spanish and no English.

But that demographic does not slow Ms. Wise -- the teacher carefully prepared identical practice canvases with a simple pattern. This kept the focus off "design process" and entirely on technique. They only needed to get used to the larger substrates and familiar with the tools to be seriously coaxing colors through 3'x5' mesh.

Clearly introducing anything new is a delicate matter -- neighbors laughed at the idea of rag rugs. Now, that Fair Trade rugs are gaining in popularity and the women are making money even the man, who did not want his wife going off-loom, fervently picks through racks to supply her. And, on the buyer's side there are always the frictions from "purist's"; they believe that hooking is some form of cultural "invasion."

Fortunately, serious collectors will be able to appreciate the signature displays of exuberance of the Mayans and others at The Anderson Center showing “Mary Anne Wise & Friends: The Art of the Hooked Rug” from 24SEP-23NOV11. Opening: 23SEP11

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TAGS: Hooked Rugs, Mayans, Minnesota, Anderson Center, Fair Trade, Mary Anne Wise, Oxlajuj B’atz’

Oxlajuj B’atz’ (Thirteen Threads) is a non-profit indigenous women’s empowerment and non-formal education organization based in Guatemala since 2004. We are a project of Asociación Tejedoras Unidas - *Komon Ajkem* in Guatemala and our fiscal sponsor in the U.S. is the Maya Educational Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public foundation. www.thirteenthreads.org

If you are interested in more information about Mary Anne Wise or to book an interview please contact Kaylen Whitmore Cell: 612-281-7257 or email kaylenw@hotmail.com