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*A Century of Color: Maya Weaving and Textiles* [DVD]. Paul G. Vitale and Ka Mossman Vitale, producers. Vallejo, CA: Endangered Threads Documentaries, 2007. 53

*Splendor in the Highlands: Maya Weavers of Guatemala* [DVD]. Paul G. Vitale and Ka Mossman Vitale, producers. Vallejo, CA: Endangered Threads Documentaries, 2005. 27

## Reviewed by Walter E. Little

Maya weavers and textiles have long been romantic subjects for scholars and collectors. Both *A Century of Color: Maya Weaving and Textiles* and *Splendor in the Highlands: Maya Weavers of Guatemala*, videos by Endangered Threads Documentaries, explore Maya textile production within two distinct forms of romanticism. In the former longer documentary, Maya textiles are seen as under threat and in danger of disappearing. In the latter shorter documentary, Margot Blum Schevill narrates, "Maya and Maya weavers are alive and well today." These perspectives can be taken as positions to stimulate interest in a concerted action to help keep Maya textile production vibrant.

Both documentaries share a number of characteristics. They explain continuities and changes in Guatemalan textiles and some technical aspects of weaving or other techniques related to the production of textiles. They are filled with beautiful footage of the Guatemalan highlands, Mayas dressed in splendid clothes, and footage of weavers practicing their craft. Each documentary provides a summary of the content that was presented. Despite the somewhat parallel structures and common themes, the two documentaries do not duplicate each other.

*A Century of Color* traces continuities and change in textiles. It uses the Gustavus A. Eisen 1902 collection as a starting point but it also makes romantic connections to the Maya past. The Eisen collection is the most extensive early collection of Guatemalan textiles and features primarily clothing for daily wear. It is housed at the University of California at Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology.

The filmmakers take good care to situate contemporary Guatemala weavers within contexts of poverty and the violence against Mayas. In addition, they explain that these political and economic conditions and changes, including the introduction of used factory-made clothing from the United States threaten both Maya weavers and their products. They also warn of places in the documentary that cultural traditions that support weaving are disappearing and that this is contributing to the disappearance of Maya weaving in Guatemala. Such observations about the perils faced by Maya weaving are, however, it is certain that Maya weaving is changing.

The film's strength is that it emphasizes that Maya textiles—their production and styles—have always changed. The filmmaker does a fine job of illustrating how and why Maya weavers have developed new techniques for weaving and innovated new styles. Their products remain distinctly Maya. There are plenty of examples of weavers from dozens of communities using traditional looms. Changes in materials are discussed, such as how loom sticks today are not always made of wood, but of plastic. Technical aspects, such as the jaspé dyeing process, turning the loom, and finishing selvages versus cutting the text on the loom are explained to demonstrate the skills of the weavers and differences in quality.

Differences in textile and clothing styles between communities are also noted. The filmmakers discuss clothing, observing that huipiles (blouses worn by Maya women), are "a fine example of a weaver's skill." This contrasts with the approach of many Maya textile collectors by emphasizing that being in style is important. So often textiles are presented as fashion rather than as fashion that follows trends. New fashions develop from innovative individuals, generational differences, and the flow of clothing among communities. The filmmakers note that there is a practice of exchanging styles and learning to make designs and styles of other communities. Such exchanges often lead to new styles that reflect a Pan-Maya fashion sense rather than one based on one specific community.

With respect to men's clothing, the filmmakers note that religious changes are impacting men's clothing, especially Chichicastenango, and that work and labor conditions have had a dramatic, negative impact on men's clothing. Or

towns, like Solola and Todos Santos, do men still wear their traditional clothing.

The filmmakers, using various communities as examples, explain how the traditional woman's outfit is disappearing. This, however, is contrasted at the end of the film by a statement that Maya weaving continues, despite political, economic other changes that Mayas face today.

The shorter film, *Splendor in the Highlands*, begins with an explanation as to why Maya textile traditions persist. It includes a discussion of the impacts of the international market and tourism on weavers and their textiles, as well as of prices. School is presented as a distraction, implying that it is incompatible with weaving. This sets up a traditional dichotomy that is present throughout the film. Curiously, while some elements of modernity may negatively impact the wearing of traditional clothing, tourism is presented as having a positive impact, allowing weavers to produce for Guatemala and for international clients.

It is ironic, however, that the filmmakers do not allow for Maya clothing styles to be compatible with most modern Guatemalan life. In fact, Mayas, both men and women, are wearing new styles that are distinctly Maya in wide, non-social contexts, sometimes at the expense of being discriminated against by the politically and economically dominant numerically fewer, non-Maya population.

In this film, different technical aspects are featured than in *A Century of Color*. It shows how to warp a loom, for emphasizing the skill needed to weave. In addition, the amount of labor and time needed to weave a Patzun huipil most popular huipil styles throughout Guatemala is illustrated. It is inferred that in the labor of weaving other is incorporated into the daily lives of weavers and that weaving itself is a communal activity.

Unfortunately, in either film, there is little said in the words of the weavers themselves. While much is made of how and do the act of weaving, no comments by weavers about the impacts of social, political, and economic change are made. The weaver or vendor offers reasons about how used clothing from the United States or tourism, for example, hurt or help. This distances the viewer from the weavers themselves, de-emphasizing the role that real people play in the production and consumption of Maya textiles.

The summary at the end of this film, as in the other, is a nice feature for classroom use, but both films are most appealing to popular audiences and high school students unfamiliar with Guatemala and Maya textiles.

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