

# Bringing Mexico to Your Community!

Margaritas Restaurants concept is based on bringing Mexico to New England. Upon entering our restaurants you are surrounded with the art and atmosphere of Mexico. We make frequent trips to local artist communities in Mexico in search of authentic hand-carved furniture, folk art and décor for each Margaritas restaurant. During those trips we come in contact with many talented artisans. We have a wonderful way to share that experience with our community. We invite Mexican artists into our restaurants and local schools! This provides a unique opportunity for us to share our knowledge of Mexico, and for the community to meet outstanding Mexican folk artists. The artists share their techniques, lecture on life in present day Mexico and provide an interactive experience for students and teachers.



## Manuel Abeiro Horta and Modesto Horta Visiting Artists from Tócuaro, Michoacán



The village of Tócuaro is located in the Sierra Madre Mountains in the state of Michoacán.

The town of Tócuaro, is famous for its ancestral tradition of carving wooden masks for the Pastorelas dance that is celebrated each year on the 2nd of February. Each mask is unique and the product of the artisan's creativity and imagination. Like most pieces of folk art, the masks passed from being simple carvings to true examples of the carvers' extraordinary skills. Each year collector's travel to the village to witness the fiesta.

Manuel Abeiro and Modesto are two of the five sons of Juan Horta, our first visiting artist from Mexico. Manuel Abeiro accompanied Juan on his last tour in 2006. Shortly after that tour, our dear friend Juan passed away. Now his sons are carrying on the family tradition of carving wooden masks. Like their father, each son has his own personal touch and style that personifies an Horta Family mask. In addition to traditional dance masks, they particularly enjoy carving animal masks and adorning them with hair and whiskers made from the hide of wild boars. Like their famous father, Manuel Abeiro and Modesto have exhibited their masks throughout Mexico and the United States. Most recently, the brothers displayed their masks at the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe, NM. Both sons started learning their craft when they were young boys. By the time they were twelve they started carving and helped their famous father make wooden masks. They have been carving ever since.



Manuel Abeiro, Juan Jose and Modesto all work in their father's old workshop.

# Mexican Masks

Mask making has been a tradition for centuries in Mexico. During pre-Hispanic times the Aztecs used masks as part of their religious ceremonies. Masks were worn in ritual dances and used by the dancers to represent persons or animals; the dance's purpose was to tell a story in which the desired result was achieved through the magic of imitation. After the Spanish Conquest, Christian traditions were incorporated into the folk art of mask making.

Mexican masks are usually made of wood, with leather, bone, and often with genuine hair and teeth added. They may also be fashioned from other materials such as animal shells and tin. The masks can be painted, lacquered, or left in a natural state.

Mexican masked dances have been classified into five major categories: historical, Christian, occupational, nature-related, and entertainment-oriented. Historical dances relate to actual events occurring in the history of Mexico, such as the conquest by the Spanish; Christian dances primarily dramatize the triumph of Christianity over paganism; occupational dances reflect the duties and skills of those involved; nature-related dances relate to weather control and the fertility of crops and animals; and entertainment oriented dances are primarily for amusement or the teaching of social lessons.

Masked dances are usually performed in the feast day of a village's patron saint, on general religious holidays such as Carnival or Christmas, and on national holidays. Dancers often perform in fulfillment of personal vows or as members of dance societies. Only men, who impersonate female characters as well, usually wear masks. Women may occasionally participate in certain dances, but they do not wear masks.

Community masked dance performances require huge expenditures of time and money. The successful presentation of masked dances is usually the responsibility of a community's mayor, a voluntary civil-religious position held by a man or woman. However, it is more often a knowledgeable dance leader or maestro who selects and trains the dancers, choreographs the steps, and supervises the final performance. Musicians often accompany the dancers. Each village usually holds one major fiesta a year, which serves as its source of community pride and status.



Turquoise Mask of Xiuhtecuhtli the god of fire; Aztec, 14th Century



Juanito the son of Juan Jose Horta holds up a mask carved and painted by his father.



Dance of the curpites with maringilla mask. The dance is celebrated in Michoacán, and represents the Spaniards with "La Malinche", the woman who befriended Cortez and became his translator during the Conquest of Mexico..

# Danza de Las Pastorelas/Shepherd's Play



Pastorelas Dance with Diablo and Pastores in the background.. The devil mask was carved by Juan Horta. His son Orlando is wearing the mask.

The Shepherd's Play or Pastorelas is a morality play that originated in medieval Europe and later was brought to the new world by the Spanish missionaries in an effort to evangelize the indigenous people and convert them to Christianity. The play is celebrated with a group of players who take their performance through the streets of the village. The players represent three devils (with devil masks), an angel, a hermit (with mask), shepherds and numerous villagers (with masks). The Horta family specialize in making masks for the Pastorelas. However they are also sought out to carve masks for other Mexican fiestas and dances

The Pastorelas still takes place every year on the 2nd of February in Tócuaro, Michoacán. The fiesta celebrates the Feast of the Candelaria and typically lasts from 3 to 4 days. In addition to the Pastorelas dance the village hosts a rodeo and community dances that attract many people from surrounding villages. A communal gathering called a Piracua is held and sponsors for the following year's fiesta are selected; thus ensuring the tradition continues.



Rosi Horta, Modesto's daughter in her Pastora costume. Each year different family members are chosen to perform in the dance.



Characters from the Pastorelas dance pose wearing carved masks



Tócuaro is located on the shore of Lake Patzcuaro in the center of Michoacán state.



# Artist Presentation

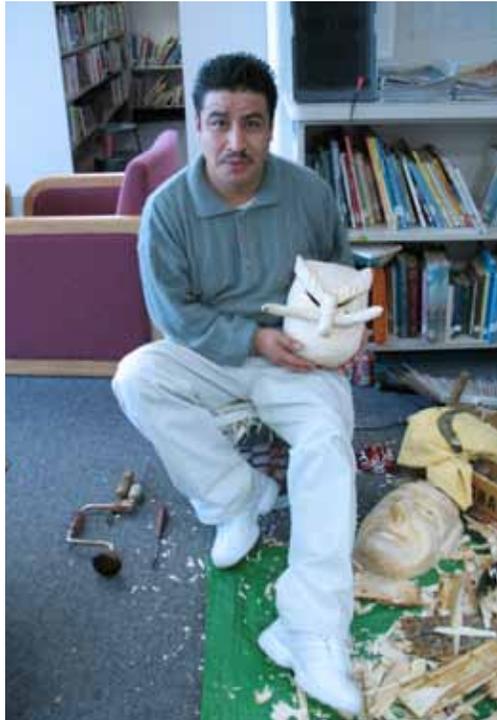
On the day of the visit, Manuel Abeiro and Modesto will demonstrate how to carve a wooden mask using hand forged knives, crude chisels and a hunk of wood. Throughout the day students will have the opportunity to observe the various phases involved in making the mask.

A video portraying scenes from Mexico will also be shown. The images reveal the lives and activities of present day Mexican people. There is also a display of masks and other carvings made by the Horta brothers in Mexico. Items on display are also for sale to the staff and if permission is allowed for students, they also purchase items on display. Students are given time to ask the artists questions. There are also mask samples to pass around and even try on. The purpose of this day long visit is to expose students to this fascinating country. They will be presented with many facets of life in Mexico. This experience will allow them to meet and talk with Mexican folk artists. The program is designed to integrate with various school curricula to impact the widest student population. Students studying Spanish, art, world cultures and social studies will be enthralled with this unique opportunity to visit with these “cultural ambassadors”.

At the end of the day, Manuel Abeiro and Modesto will present the carved mask to the school. This will remain as a lasting symbol of these unique artists from Mexico, whose presence in one day enlivens and sparks the imaginations of those who come in contact with them.



Modesto carves in the art room in front of a class.



Manuel Abeiro with owl mask that was carved in the school library in front of students.



Students take turns passing around a mask.

# Student Activities

- \* Consult school librarian for books about Mexico and folk art.
- \* Spend class time studying Mexico.
- \* Have students identify Spanish words they may know.
- \* Learn some Spanish words or greetings.
- \* Discuss some of the differences between the United States and Mexico.
- \* Discuss activities involved when traveling to other countries.
- \* On the day of the artists visit observe the display of crafts.
- \* Prepare questions for the artists.

## SITE PREPARATION FOR GUEST ARTISTS

- \* Provide a suitable space for artist and exhibit, such as a multi-purpose room, large classroom or open area to accommodate 50-75 students (or more). This is for all Lecture/Demonstrations.
- \* Provide a table 2' x 8' and 3 chairs.
- \* **Schedule no more than (5) 45 minute sessions (4 hours total contact time).**
- \* You may videotape all activities for future references.



Owl mask by Modesto Horta



Skull mask by Manuel Abeiro Horta

# Topics for Discussion

**FOLK ART-** Artwork that is created within a community or region reflecting local or generational experiences, often the techniques and traditions are passed on from one generation to the other. Many of the crafts produced by folk artists include wood carving, ceramics, basket-making, weaving, embroidery, metalwork, etc.

- Can you give some examples of crafts or folk art you've seen?
- What are some of the ways of learning a craft?
- Have you seen hand made crafts from Mexico before? Where?

**MEXICO-** Mexico is a colorful country inhabited for centuries by ancient civilizations. Since the arrival of the Spanish, the country has blended ancient ritual with European tradition. The present day country reflects the combination of these two influences.

- What are some examples of Mexican culture that you can identify?
- Even though we share a common border with Mexico, why do you think our countries are so different?
- In what ways has Mexican culture influenced our own?

**MEXICAN VILLAGE LIFE-** As you might know, much of Mexico is still rural with many cultural ties to its ancient past. The more isolated the village, the more traditional customs prevail. Agriculture, family and religion dominant activities of many small villages throughout Mexico.

- Can you locate Mexico on a map? Mexico state (hint it's near Mexico City)?
- How does climate and terrain affect life in Mexico?
- How is village life in the United States different from Mexico?

**MEXICAN PEOPLE-** Up until the arrival of Europeans, the western hemisphere was inhabited by indigenous, cultures. Many great civilizations flourished in what is present day Mexico. The Aztec and Mayan people are the most well known. Our artists' ancestors lived in a region that resisted the control by the Aztec empire. The Purepecha culture of Michoacán still exists in remote villages and the Purepecha language is spoken instead of Spanish.

- How far back can you trace your family?
- What are some Native American tribes in the United States? What Native American tribe lived in your area?
- Can you identify Native American contributions to our culture?

**MULTICULTURALISM-** This program is based on the exploration into the life and traditions of another culture. American society is made up of people from various cultural origins. The guest artists will also reveal that their cultural origins are equally diverse.

- Why is it important to learn about other cultures?
- Can you trace the cultural origins in your family?
- What might be some reasons for cultures to mix and influence each other?

## VOCABULARY

(you may hear many of these words during the artists visit)

artesanía- folk art, craft  
máscara- mask  
madera- wood  
copalillo- soft wood used for masks  
leña- firewood  
pintura- paint  
herramienta- tool  
cara- face  
cuerpo- body  
ojo- eye  
boca- mouth  
nariz- nose  
mano- hand  
pierna- leg  
pie- foot  
brazo- arm  
dedo- finger, toe  
comida- food  
frijoles- beans  
tortillas- ground corn patty  
campo- field  
campesino- field worker  
maestro- teacher, master craftsman  
alumno- student

pueblo- village, people  
esposa(o)- wife, husband  
abuelo(a)- grandfather, grandmother  
hijos- children in the same family  
niño- child  
muchacho- boy  
muchacha- girl  
toro- bull  
machete- large heavy knife  
casa- house  
mesa- table  
taller- workshop

Buenos días- Good morning  
Buenas tardes- Good afternoon  
Como está Usted?- How are you?  
Que pasa?- What's happening?  
De donde viene Usted?- Where are you from?  
Hasta luego- Until then; later  
Hasta la vista- See you later



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# Papier Mâché Mask Workshop

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1) Begin by forming an oval shape using newspaper that is crumpled and shaped in various layers. Try to keep the bottom flat, and the top curved. The shape should be the same height and width as your own face.



2) Once you have the approximate oval shape formed, use masking tape to hold the shape together. The tape actually helps to keep the shape and a firm base. Do not cover the entire form with tape; just use enough to hold the form together.



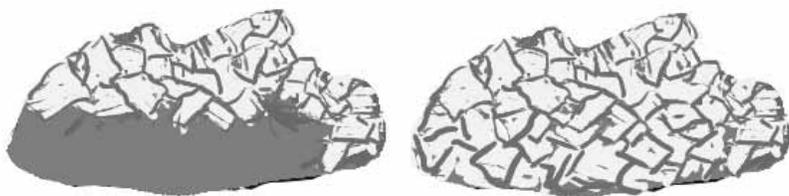
3) Cover the form with clay, no more than a 1/2 inch thick. Ceramic clay works fine as long as you keep it covered with plastic to keep it moist. Plasticine clay is oil-based and won't dry out but is more expensive. Keep your features simple yet allow for the layers of papier mache to reduce detail.



4) What you are making now is the actual face for the mask. Be aware of undercuts — shapes that are narrower at the base — they will make removing the mask difficult. Cover the entire face with cellophane or other thin plastic to act as a mold release.



5) Cover the form with pieces of newspaper 2"x 2" that are dipped in wheat paste. The thin plastic adheres to the clay and the papier mache covers the plastic. Make sure to overlap each piece by at least 1/4". Place 4 layers of papier mache for a strong mask. Allow the papier mask to dry thoroughly before removing it.



6) Once the mask is dry it can be easily removed by removing the paper form from behind the mask, and then the clay can be moved around to separate the dried papier mache from the plastic mold release. The mask can now be painted and decorated.

