

Finding Art's Niche in Santa Catarina Palopó:
The conception and value of art in a rural Kaqchikel community

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In this paper I explore the conception of art in Santa Catarina Palopo, the questions of what makes something art, and what its value and place is in a small, rural Kaqchikel town. I use participant observation and informal interviews to understand the perspective and consciousness of the people of Santa Catarina regarding art. I found that typically in Santa Catarina art is weaving, and its value is both economic and cultural, but with modernization and foreign influence a broader conception of art is being born.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, art is defined as "Skill; its display, application, or expression, An acquired ability of any kind, [or] Skill in an activity regarded as governed by aesthetic as well as organizational principles, [or] The expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power" (2009). In a Spanish dictionary arte was defined as "habilidad, maña, conjunto de reglas para hacer algo, o acto por el cual el hombre valiéndose de la materia, expresa o imita lo material o inmaterial." In my daily life the word art is used to describe something created and conceived of by an individual or group with some aesthetic and/or emotional intent.

Around the world art is defined and valued in different ways. James Clifford defines art as original and singular and culture as traditional and collective. He also diagrams the overlaps, one might say, between the two, including the spectrum from masterpiece to artefact (Clifford, 1988). This diagram visually describes some of these varying conceptions of what art could be. For example in traditional Maori communities, what I would define as artwork was not thought of as separated from culture, they were inseparable. From my experience of Maori art it seemed to straddle the line between original and traditional, collective and singular. Whereas art in more Western cultures, like the United States, tends to more narrowly and clearly define art as original and singular.

Not only defining art, but finding its value or role in communities and individual lives has become a popular subject of research. Joshua Guetzkow puts forward a plethora of important variables and factors in how art impacts communities in his presentation,

“How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies.” He delineates kinds of impacts across economic, social, cultural, interpersonal, and psychological frameworks. Guetzkow suggests that art can; “improve individual’s sense of belonging or attachment to a community,” “build individual social networks,” and “produce wages,” as a few examples that seem to cross the boundaries of how art is being defined (Guetzkow, 2002).

A more specific example of the research being done on the role and value of art is found in "Sites of Identity and Resistance: Urban Community Murals and Rural Wall Decoration in South Africa" by Sabine Marschall, which describes two different ways in which art can be used to in identity formation and display. The urban murals are community art, where a community is involved in the conception and production of the mural, an expression of community identity and issues. Rural wall painting is done on private homesteads and is an expression of individual’s and ethnic group identity. Whereas in rural areas identity may be clearly tied to ethnic group, in urban settings murals are an opportunity for "new models in their search for identity, an identity that is influenced by the forces of modern development and Westernization" (Marschall, 2002).

I have taken this line of research and narrowed it even further by exploring these issues specifically in the community of Santa Catarina Palopo, Solola, Guatemala. Santa Catarina is a poor, rural Kaqchikel town located on the mountains that surround Lake Atitlan. The population of Santa Catarina is around 3,000. Santa Catarina’s economy is based primarily in tourism. Traditionally, Santa Catarina was an agricultural and fishing community, but as tourists began frequenting the town about 40 years ago, it has made a drastic and nearly complete transition to a tourist economy. Thus it was clear to me from the beginning of my research that art has a strong economic role in this community, as long as the weavings being sold would be considered art. My research set out at first to find arts

place in Santa Catarina outside of its economic value. It became clear to me very early on though, that an approach that did not embrace the economic value would a very forced and sparse view, one that would not reflect the consciousness of the people of Santa Catarina.

My research instead strives to provide a holistic and place based ethnography of art in Santa Catarina. This means that I have attempted to find the definition and conception of art that is present in Santa Catarina and how it is valued and viewed by the people living in Santa Catarina. In this paper I will first define my research methods. Then, I will explore the definitions of art and individual's answers to the question, "what is art to you?" Next, I will describe and explain what the "arte tipico of Santa Catrina is and what other art I was able to uncover there. With this grounding of what art in Santa Catarina is, I will examine the importance and value of this art for the community and individuals within it. The final portion of my paper will be used to dispel any sense of a static place of art in Santa Catarina, and to explore its future.

Methodology

My research for this paper has been completed during three weeks living in Santa Catarina Palopo. All of my research was conducted in Spanish, which was a second language both for myself and for the informants, whose first language was Kaqchikel. My research consisted of three categories of methods or areas. My research started in the home I was living in Santa Catarina, through conversation, observation and participation. The bulk of my research was done through formal or informal interviews with a broad sample of the people of Santa Catarina, from weavers to butchers, though focused more heavily on the former. I also used the school in Santa Catarina as a specific sight of observation and interviews, because I believe it could reflect the values of the community, and foreshadow how the next generation will think about art.

My homestay was with a family who is steeped in Santa Catarina history. In the home with me lived two parents both around 60 years old, and four daughters; one was in 6th grade of primary school, one was in her third year of *Basico*, one that worked as a receptionist in the *Municipio*, and the last split her time between weaving and helping to lead a women's association in Santa Catarina. This family became the grounding for my research through many conversations about the definition and value of art in Santa Catarina. Most of the members of the family and extended family have some interaction with art, either because they are weavers, or are learning about art in school. With in my homestay I also spent a great deal of time learning to weave from the mother and oldest sister of the family, providing me with a more insider perspective on the most common art and work of women in Santa Catarina.

My approach to interviewing people outside of my family was for the most part very informal. At first I used contacts to families that my classmates were living with as my informants, particularly family members that considered themselves artists. Then I began informally interviewing women who were vending and weaving both along the street that leads to the docks as well as in Galleries or shops, which line the main street. I also conversed with children who approached me while I was drawing, and I asked them about their interest in art and their practice of art. In order to broaden my perspective further I also walked back into the side streets of Santa Catarina, stopping to interview shopkeepers of all sorts and women that I saw were working on some form of art.

My research in the school in Santa Catarina consisted of both observing three classes, and interviewing each of those teachers, as well as interviewing the teacher of *artes plasticos* and *artes industriales* and one of the directors of the school. I observed a pre-primary or approximately kindergarten equivalent classroom, a second grade primary class, and a music class for first year *Basico* students. In each of primary classrooms art was

being used to teach other concepts and specifically language throughout the class period. I interviewed the teachers and director specifically about the importance of art in their classroom, what it was being used for and how it was expected to benefit the students in the long term. Most of the teachers at the school in Santa Catarina come in from outside to teach and all of the educational guidelines are nationally implaced.

For all of my interviews, regardless of the informant, I had a main set of questions, which evolved throughout my research. I began with basic questions to get a sense of what art meant in Santa Catarina. For example:

- How do you say art in Kaqchikel?
- What does the word art mean? And what things are included under the name art?
- What kind of art is there in Santa Catarina?
- Why do people (or you) do art?

I also began with some questions specific to the most prominent art, weaving. For example:

- Is your huipil (woven shirt) art?
- Why do you wear a huipil?
- What does your huipil communicate to the public?

As I continued asking many people these questions, I was forced to reform them and further direct them in order to draw people to be more introspective and reflective, but also in order not be putting words in their mouths. My questions evolved towards the questions below.

- What is the importance of art for the community versus the individual?
- How has art/weaving changed over time here? Why?
- What do the figures and colours represent?
- Is there art in the school here? Is it important for students to learn art? Why?
- Are art and the culture here connected?
- Are art and identity related?

At the end I found that it was most useful to ask very broad lead in questions, like what do you think of art in Santa Catarina? and to then follow them up with asking what they mean by what they said and why. Throughout my research in Santa Catarina I was constantly on the lookout for other unmentioned forms of art. The art that I found included graffiti and wall art, a few murals, and the cemetery, each of which then became the basis for new questions directed towards the reason for and importance of those pieces of art.

Definitions and Conceptions: What is Art?

As was shown through the various definitions of art in both an English and a Spanish dictionary, art is not a clear or simple word to pin down, and it is no simpler in Santa Catarina. In my interviewing I found a variety of different definitions for the word art, as well as a number of people entirely unwilling or unable to define the word. In this section of the paper I will build a foundation of what art means and how and if it is conceived of specifically in Santa Catarina. For the most part those that had a conception of art saw it as a physical expression of feelings or thoughts, along with a concept of the individuality of each piece of art.

When I began asking people the question “what is art in your mind” I got almost as many blank stares and confused looks as I did responses. This gave me the impression that art is not a very solid concept in their minds, or that they had a concept of it but were unable to explain it in Spanish. My host sister, Lydia, made the claim that about 85 percent of the people in Santa Catarina probably do not know or understand the word art, because for them, even if they are themselves weavers, it is just work, it is what they do. The claim that art is either a new concept or not very solidified concept in this community is further substantiated by the fact that there is not an obvious word for art in Kaqchikel.

Although I was told early in my research by a non-resident of Santa Catarina that art would be translated to “samaj” in Kaqchikel, which also means work or job. But, when I asked people in Santa Catarina what this question they were hesitant, and often did not come up with an answer. My host family spent many minutes discussing amongst themselves in Kaqchikel about what word might mean art. They decided that there is no exact translation, but that there are words for each different kind of art and that there is a word for “expression de la naturaleza” or expression of the natural world, which is “wutchubuj wutchulep.” With this they were suggesting that expression of nature is one kind of art and

the other kind of art is more functional, for example the difference between painting a picture and painting a wall. When asking a group of children how to say art in Kaqchikel, they thought and chattered for a moment before telling me, “ken.” “Ken” actually translates to English as weaving, which is interesting and appropriate for a place where the most prominent art is weaving.

The people who did have an understanding or at least a concept of the word art thought about it in a very concrete way. In response to my question “what is art?” I would often be told one or a few kinds of art. The two most prominent responses were drawing or painting and weaving. In a discussion with my host family I was provided with a relatively complete list of what is considered art and what is not. For them art includes weaving, carpentry, metal work, wall painting, picture painting, ceramics, stone work, basketry, and mat weaving, but art does not include music, dance or myths, these are part of culture. The reasoning behind these distinctions is very telling about most of the art in Santa Catarina. Lydia claimed that culture is what we have been passed down from our ancestors, whereas art is work and it is the “renovation of culture.” This speaks directly to the interrelationship of art and culture that I drew from James Clifford’s diagram (1988). Art is being defined as something individual and unique, but its role is to recreate that which is communal and traditional. This understanding suggests a great deal of consciousness about art. Not only has she defined her culture as something separate from art, but she also has a conception of how the two are, in modern times, overlapping.

Many others’ definitions of art were focused on the idea that art is connected to the individual. By which I mean to say that they wanted to make it clear that art was unique to each individual, not like a factory making thousands of the same piece of cloth. This is a particularly interesting concept to me because both in the paintings and weavings I saw in Santa Catarina there was a clear style. Many of the subjects or patterns were the same and

there were clear trends in colours also. Still people told me that their art was the “expression of [their] feelings,” “[their] way of thinking and making,” or “[their] own ideas.” By personalizing what can appear to be commercial or reproduced, which Clifford describes as “not art” (1988), these people are claiming that their work is art. It is a marketing technique to define ones work as art, and be able to not only claim that it is art, but to also be able to specifically define that to a buyer by saying that it is original, unique, and handmade. Lydia, one of my main informants, suggested that although most of the people weaving the goods in Santa Catarina do not think about their work as art, the ones who are selling directly to tourists must conceive and value the work as art in order to be able to sell it.

Still other weavers, who also viewed their work as art, explained their work and the ideas as coming from tradition. These people seem to contradict Clifford’s definition of art by claiming that their ideas are from patterns, from their parents, and that they are doing the weaving exactly as those before them have, without any sense of creativity or invention. This also functions as a marketing tactic because there is an understanding that tourists have come to see what is traditional, a static conception of the culture of Santa Catarina. Thus it becomes beneficial to the artists to conceive of their work as a reproduction of that culture and past, as something pure and untouched by globalization. These conceptions of art reflect the dual value of art in Santa Catarina as both modernizing and traditional.

Arte Tipico

Just by walking up from the docks and along the main street it becomes very clear that the “arte tipico” in Santa Catarina is weaving. There are galleries, stores, house fronts, and paths devoted to selling weavings. The different venues each have an inventory of huipiles (woven blouses), fajas (woven belts), cortas (woven skirts), which are the traditional dress or traje of the women in Santa Catarina. Most places also sell various non-

traditional woven items, such as table centers, bags, and scarves aimed more directly at tourists. Weavings are also constantly on display around the town because most of the women and a few of the men continue to wear traje.

Weaving is the main art and the women's work in Santa Catarina, according to Lydia, because the patron saint of the town is female. This means that there are more women in Santa Catarina than there are men, and thus the main art is a women's art. Other people informed me that there has always been weaving in Santa Catarina, which is unlike painting or other kinds of arts which have been brought in.

Weaving and the traje of this place are woven deeply into their idea of their culture. This was made particularly clear to me on two specific occasions. The first was when I was questioning my host family about what it meant for them to be Kaqchikel or indigenous, and the two qualities they highlighted were their language and their clothing. The other occasion was at the school in Santa Catarina, where culturally sensitive textbooks were highlighting weaving. An Educational Guideline book that described the four themes of education for six year olds included the theme of "weaving relationships." And, in a Kaqchikel textbook for the second grade, the parts of a backstrap loom were shown as well as the different kinds of huipiles represented by Kaqchikel speaking peoples. All of these incidences highlighted for me the extent to which weaving and specifically traje are ingrained in the concept of the culture of Santa Catarina, and the indigenous people who inhabit it.

Beyond this indigenous cultural identity, one of the most important qualities of the weaving and traje in Santa Catarina described to me was the intense sense that it was rooted in their town, their place, distinct from other surrounding towns. The people describe their work as "el tipico de aqui," and "el imagen de aqui," emphasizing the importance of this place where they are from. Although other towns in the vicinity also wear woven shirts and

skirts, they emphasized the uniqueness of their traje, saying that one can tell people from different places apart specifically by their traje. This was made starkly clear to me in Panajachel, where there were vendors from many different towns, and I could automatically pick out who was from Santa Catarina and who was not just by their huipiles.

A number of people would even claim that the weavings in Santa Catarina were more of an art than in most other places, because they were more creative. Huipiles in Santa Catarina are transforming. Thirty years ago everyone was wearing simple red huipiles, but now the huipiles are colourful and covered in figures and patterns. This modernization, or as Lydia described it, “continuing further forward”, underlines the importance of creativity or invention in some people’s definition of art. She continued to say that other places weave, but they do not have the same expression or art as the weavings in Santa Catarina.

The figures, designs and colours that are being used are for the most part representations of the place and environment where they are being woven. They “express the nature that we have here.” One of the styles of huipil right now in Santa Catarina is made of blue and green colours and has geometric patterns. The green and blue represent the lake and the mountains that are the source of much of the town’s subsistence and livelihood, as well as the images that dominate their physical environment. Other styles depict figures of different plants and animals from their environment often including; trees, maize, roses, butterflies, dogs, cats, and birds. Thus the art is not just tipico or from “here” culturally, but it is directly rooted in the physical environment of Santa Catarina.

Other Art in Santa Catarina Palopo

In order to get a more full view of art in Santa Catarina, beyond the most prominent weaving, I was constantly looking for what other kinds of art were being done. Drawing, painting and other functional art forms were present on a smaller scale. I came across

drawing in very informal ways, mostly because of children who were watching me draw. Interspersed among the weaving galleries and shops were shops selling very stylized paintings. Finally, observing in the school I experienced the use of a variety of drawing and craft projects as well as the presence of music, industrial and home arts.

From my research I would claim that almost every child in Santa Catarina is a budding artist, they all like to and do draw. Many of these children came to my attention because they would approach me while I was doing my own drawing, and I would ask them about their drawing. I was introduced to many other young drawers in the families that other classmates were living with. A theme was very clear across all of these children, which was echoed by the painters and even a mural in the school. This theme was to draw “el paisaje,” which entails the lake, the volcanos across the lake, and perhaps a fisherman on the lake. There were of course other drawings or subjects, including houses, trees, and people, but for the most part drawings reflected the physical environment of the artists.

Similarly, the paintings in Santa Catarina were most commonly of the lake or of people doing traditional or culturally relevant work. Although many paintings being sold in Santa Catarina are done by artists in Santiago Atitlan, there are a growing number of painters in Santa Catarina. Painting is clearly new in Santa Catarina, and it does not have the cultural ties that weaving has, but the painters are imbuing their work with both the cultural and physical roots of Santa Catarina through their subject matter. One painter that I interviewed claimed that in his paintings he could “give life to life” and even more than that he tried to bring the past to life. He was connecting his new medium to the traditional culture and physical location by making it alive in his paintings.

Art also finds its place in the school in Santa Catarina. In both of the general education classrooms I visited drawing and other forms of art were used as ways to get and hold children’s attention to a subject, and to begin to teach Spanish or Castellán. In the first

classroom that I entered, pre-primary, the walls were entirely plastered in art projects and there was a large drawing of a lake and volcanoes on the white board. By second grade the art had been toned down, but the teacher still drew two shoes, one large and one small, to teach those basic concepts and words, and then had each child draw, colour, and label the two shoes. In the national educational guidelines, artistic expression was one of six subject areas, but in Santa Catarina the teachers cannot always do as much art as they would like to because of a lack of resources and materials. There are three areas of art taught to the *Basico* level students including, painting and theory of art, music, and industrial arts for boys and home arts for girls. But as with the art in the younger ages, the classes were short and infrequent because of a lack of resources.

At the school, but outside of the classrooms I experienced art in the form of creative costumes made by students for their Carnival celebration and a mural hidden on a wall of the school. The costumes, though by subject matter were not tied to the culture of Santa Catarina, were tied to it by their circumstance. Most notable about this art work was the ingenuity and creativity. This glimpse of imagination was something that was otherwise hardly seen in Santa Catarina, and in my mind speaks to the dynamic and changing value of art in all its possible forms in Santa Catarina. The mural in the school is another example of this seeming transformation. It was instigated by a foreign organization, and intentionally has the look of any other drawing or painting you would see in Santa Catarina, the lake and volcano with a woman from Santa Catarina (identifiable by her traje) weaving with a back strap loom.

Value and Role of Art

The way that I have spent most of my life thinking about art, as something done for individual expression, something used to communicate ideas and thoughts something valued for its own sake, is only a very small seed of a concept in Santa Catarina. Art in

Santa Catarina has above all else a utilitarian value, most notably an economic value. As an afterthought, or usually existing outside of thought, art is valued for its role in the culture as an integral part of life. My own experience and other perspectives suggest other values that art might have in Santa Catarina that were not noted in my interviews.

I asked nearly every person I interviewed about why art is done in Santa Catarina, or why art is important in Santa Catarina, and the first response was always something along the lines of, “to make money.” The exact responses ranged from it being their work, to art being made to sell to tourists, to being able to survive. First and foremost art is these people’s job. Tourism is the basis of the economy in Santa Catarina, and that is almost all through selling art, mostly weavings. I tried very hard to get past this value by asking questions like, if you could not sell your work, would you still weave, would there still be value to weaving? But, instead of getting past the economic value, I was often faced with the severity of the necessity of these people, and also the deepness of the economic importance of art. People would respond that even if there was no one to buy their weavings now, then it would still be important to continue, because it is their only work, and someone would come to buy it someday. It was surprising to me that such a large percentage of the community could be relying and living off of selling weavings to tourists. Chip Morris, a Mesoamerica textile expert claims that if a family already has a house and a milpa (maize field), that the minimal extra money gained by weaving can support their other expenses.

The value of art in the school was described, for the most part, in similarly utilitarian terms. Art’s value in the school was primarily to teach other concepts and ideas. For example making a collage about the materials found around the lake was done to learn the materials and words, not to be creative or expressive. Art is used particularly to teach Spanish, and the value of learning Spanish is to then be able to better sell art to tourist,

coming back to the primary purpose of art in the community. According to the educational guidelines artistic expression is valued because it should help teach communication, self expression, appreciation, description and observation, but most of these values were not mentioned by the teachers. The teachers of *artes plasticos* and *artes industriales* both saw their roles and goals as very concrete. They were not working towards, as the director of the school suggested art could be used for, “multiple intelligences, building confidence, learning about them selves, or developing them as people,” but instead were trying to teach the skills of their various arts so that students could get jobs in those areas.

I also asked people in Santa Catarina who are not specifically affiliated with the school about the value of learning or doing art in school. Many had no knowledge that their children were doing art in school, perhaps an effect of not having a concept of art. Those that did know that art was part of their children’s education thought for the most part it was good for them to be learning more things, this idea seemed to stem from a concept that education is what will move the community forward and thus all education is a positive thing. Lydia suggested that it was valuable for the youth to learn art, and to learn to be creative because of the need to creatively economize in their lives. She gave a trash can in the school, which is made out of plastic bottles as an example of that creative economizing. For the most part the school shares the utilitarian view of art, but there is also a small, and perhaps growing sense of a greater importance for students to do and learn about art for its other values.

Another utilitarian value of art in Santa Catarina, is that of wearing their art in the form of traje. When I tried to probe deeper into the importance of weaving, the second answer after to sell it, was usually to wear it. In fact many weavers told me that the best huipiles they weaved were for them to wear, and a man who was selling huipiles told me that his wife would sell hers only after she was done wearing them. Although, making

huipiles to wear is clearly an important value of art in Santa Catarina, because it is so much a part of life, it is not automatically thought of as why they are doing it or its importance. One person said to me, in response to me asking about why they weave and wear huipiles, “what else would we wear, leaves?” This is an example of how art’s value is almost taken for granted in Santa Catarina, perhaps that is to say that art is so rooted in Santa Catarina that it becomes hidden.

The depth of this underlying value and importance of art lies in its traditional connection to the culture of Santa Catarina. The ancestors of these indigenous people wove and wore traje, and thus that is what these people do, it is just the way things are. Some people have suggested that wearing traje is a form of resistance to Westernization, to globalization, and to change, but from my research I would argue that the consciousness is one of upholding and demonstrating their own tradition and identity, not resisting an outside force. Just as Lydia defined art as the “renovation of culture,” wearing a huipil is a continuation of tradition. It is important to the people of Santa Catarina to reserve and pass down these traditions to their children, even as studying takes more and more of their time. Women take it upon themselves, by continuing doing and wearing what they have always been accustomed to, not to lose what their ancestors valued. One woman told me, they are following the instructions of their ancestors to continue their work of weaving.

As I commented on in the previous section of this paper, the people of Santa Catarina are very proud of the uniqueness of their weavings and huipiles, of their style. This individuality of their town’s weaving translates into a presentation of identity. The women wear their huipiles “because they are from here” and because they are “nuestro traje” or our traditional dress. One woman described her identity as a weaver and as a indigenous woman and said that by weaving and wearing her huipil she is able to communicate that identity to the public. This ability to describe a connection between their

clothing and identity was not universal. Many people answered yes when I asked if they were related and if wearing a huipil communicated their identity to others, but they could not explain it and it did not seem to be part of their own consciousness.

This communication of identity is particularly important for vendors who are trying to communicate the authenticity of their work to tourists. Walter Little's "Outside of social movements: Dilemmas of indigenous handicrafts vendors in Guatemala," discusses the decisions made and actions taken by vendors and communities "as they present their identity to tourists to whom they sell their wares ... and to themselves and other Mayas" (2004). This article presents the importance of an active creation of identity to indigenous people. I have a tendency to believe that people who are farming or selling handicrafts may not be concerned with how they present themselves to the world, as long as they are making enough money to feed their families, but their presentation seems to be essential to a vendor's success. Like the conception of their work as art, the connection to their identity can be another marketing tactic.

Looking back at Guetzkow's "Mechanisms of Arts Impacts" I am struck with how few of these values are internalized in Santa Catarina. Out of the three categories of participation in the arts Santa Catarina appears to have only "direct involvement." And, out of the six categories of impacts, from my interviews the people only seem to be conscious of two impacts, the economic or wage earning, and the cultural or sense of collective identity. Based on my own participation in learning to weave and observations, weaving could also be valued for its impacts on the individual such as, increasing self-esteem (especially for women), and increased human capital in the form of skills and creativity (Guetzkow, 2002).

A project called Looms and Threads, sees great and deep values in weaving specifically for mayan women. It provides back strap looms and thread to women in

Panabaj, Guatemala, a Tzuitujil Mayan town. The project was started after the community was practically destroyed by hurricane Stan as a way to help “restore the order to their existence” (2006). The mission and methods of this project suggest the depth of value that weaving could have for a community because, according to the project, weaving is intrinsic to Mayan women’s identity and culture, and more than this, weaving has psychological benefit of “cultivating balance, harmony, and allowing an internal restorative process to take place” (2006). These claims suggest valuable ways of looking at art in a community very similar to that of Santa Catarina, and presents possible unseen values of their own art. Which lead me to consider whether one must be conscious of these impacts or values of art in order to benefit from them.

Art as Dynamic

In a place where art seems to be so rooted in tradition and a traditional culture there is a tendency to view both that art and culture as static, but in Santa Catarina art and the place of art is not static. Weaving, the most traditional art is visibly developing in design and color. The kinds of art done in Santa Catarina are also broadening as painting becomes more popular. In the school as well, just as education in general was slowly understood as important, artistic expression is being valued in more and different ways. It is important then to examine why these changes and transformations are taking place, what kind of catalysts are behind them. It is also important to inquire of what effect these changes will have on the place of Santa Catarina. From my research in Santa Catarina it was clear to me that change is taking place, but what was less tangible is how that change will look into the future.

In order to talk about change I think it is first important to have an idea of a starting point. The father of the family I was staying with in Santa Catarina, Miguel, provided me with his recollections of what Santa Catarina was like “before.” It was tranquil and calm, the people raised corn and beans and other crops, they made *canoas* to fish from, and the women stayed at home and weaved. Before, all the men and women wore traje, and spoke only Kaqchikel, they were frightened of people who wore other clothing or spoke in Spanish. Before, he said, life was only

about following customs and doing things the way they had always done them. Miguel would say that “antiquity stayed the same, but now, in modern times everything is changing.” It is striking to me that he claims that now “everything is changing,” when it seemed so apparent to me that although there is change, that change is juxtaposed with great efforts to hold onto traditions.

The changing designs and styles of the weavings are perhaps the epitome of this contradiction. Weaving and wearing huipiles are ways of holding onto tradition, and yet the way that they are being done is being reinvented. The oldest huipil I saw was very simple all cotton white with some simple red designs, it was from the 1900's. The next latest is what some of the oldest women in Santa Catarina wear, a red with simple small figures of animals or plants. The significance of the red is said to be the blood from the suffering and struggles of the people. The next style is the blue green color scheme with geometric patterns covering the entire huipil. Now, the emerging style is less unified but includes new color schemes, either earth tones or matching colors and elaborate figures of animals and plants. A final variation of dress, is that many women are now wearing the huipil or blouse typical of other towns in their vicinity.

Some women claim that is each individual's creativity and imagination and sense of fashion that has laid the way for these changes, others credit tourists and still others the availability of new materials. Many women told me that the reason for the new designs is that they come from one person's mind and then others will copy them, and that the changes are made because new things come into fashion. Tourists are said to be inclined either to buy the most traditional patterns, or the most complicated and unique weavings, which might encourage weavers to innovate for the sake of business. And, some people felt that the reason for changes were that more colors varieties of thread have become available. I tried to tease out who the first people who changed the designs were doing it for, themselves or tourists, and I got contradicting messages. It seems to me that all of these factors could have been working together to instigate the transformations in style. I also think this can tell us that the women for the most are not consciously thinking about weaving in certain way for tourists, even if they are subconsciously catering to their preferences. Miguel also suggested that tourism was the indirect cause of the change because modernization was only possible with a stronger economy and that tourism has strengthened Santa Catarina's economy.

Outside of the changes in this traditional art form, the general conception and value of art seems to be in a process of reformation. Although the no one that I talked to overtly noted pressures from the outside affect the place of art in Santa Catarina, my observations lead me to believe that in the form of education, foreigner's projects, and some internal projects the consciousness around art is changing. Education is providing a greater awareness of art as expression and creativity and defining it as valuable. Projects like making costumes for Carnival fall outside of the normal place of art in Santa Catarina.

In my research I heard briefly about three projects instigated by outsiders that involve art. Two girls selling bracelets told me about a project they are part of where they send pictures to "godparents" in the United States in order to receive gifts or money in return. My host sister participated in a project that was run through the church, where a white woman "taught creativity" to children in Santa Catarina. The final project of this sort is the mural that was commissioned to be painted at the school in order to make it more beautiful. I at once think that having the capacity to express one self and to be creative is invaluable and that having more art in a place is usually positive, and I also question their value in Santa Catarina. As I noticed in the market in Chichicastenango, where the murals painted with the intention of serving the community were for the most part unknown to the community, I wonder to what extent these projects are pushing an outsiders value of art onto Santa Catarina. Have the instigators of these projects considered how these projects will find their place in Santa Catarina, or have they entered with a colonizing attitude that the Western conception of art is more valuable or more correct than the way that art is valued in Santa Catarina. One grandmother worried to me about the fact that fewer children were learning to weave because all of their time was taken up with studying, is this a price that Santa Catarina's people are or should be willing to pay for change and development? Weaving is the heart of art in Santa Catarina, and weaving holds the greatest value to the community. Is weaving at risk of being lost because of some of the changes that are taking place, or will the new art education be able to embrace and add to the weaving tradition.

A heartening bottom up project that I discovered in my research which has stemmed from a Santa Catarina women's association, in which the government will provide thread to the women as

economic support, represents an acceptance and acknowledgement of weavings place in Santa Catarina by its own inhabitants. The project has appealed to the first lady of Guatemala that because weaving is their livelihood, thread would be a particularly affective method of support. Even though the acknowledgment was not of weaving specifically as an art, it is an example of a movement that affirms the deep extent to which weaving is at the roots of Santa Catarina. This valueing of art in Santa Catarina is deeply rooted in its physical and cultural place, but is not static and the impact of the rest of the world may have the power to uproot it.

Conclusion

Through living in Santa Catarina and speaking with its inhabitants, I have gained a sense of the complexity of arts place in their community. It is clearly not often that someone asks these people to define or explain their work beyond buying it. The people in Santa Catarina for the most part define art as an individual's expression of their thoughts and ideas. But, more than that art is the work they do, the way that they feed their families. Art is what they learn in school. And, increasingly art is be about innovation and creativity, be that for fashion for tourists or for self expression. Is there a place in Santa Catarina to value art for arts sake, or for its other impacts that Guetzkow defines? Or do the impact and changes catalyzed by outsiders go over the heads of the people of Santa Catarina in trying to implement foreign concepts and values of art?

This paper is an ethnography of art in Santa Catarina, and is the foundation and starting place for a conversation and further research into how development and globalization will effect this small, rural Kaqchikel town and its conception of art. This research is limited by the multiple levels of second language. My ability to communicate questions in Spanish and interviewees ability to communicate their thoughts in Spanish or at times to speak Spanish at all limited my persèctive and the depth of my research. Still, I believe that I can conclude that art is valued because it in so many ways in Santa Catarina art is the life of the women. Art is the way to make money, the clothes the women wear, the way women spend hours of their day, the way they hold on to their traditions and culture, and the way they share that life and identity with the world.

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