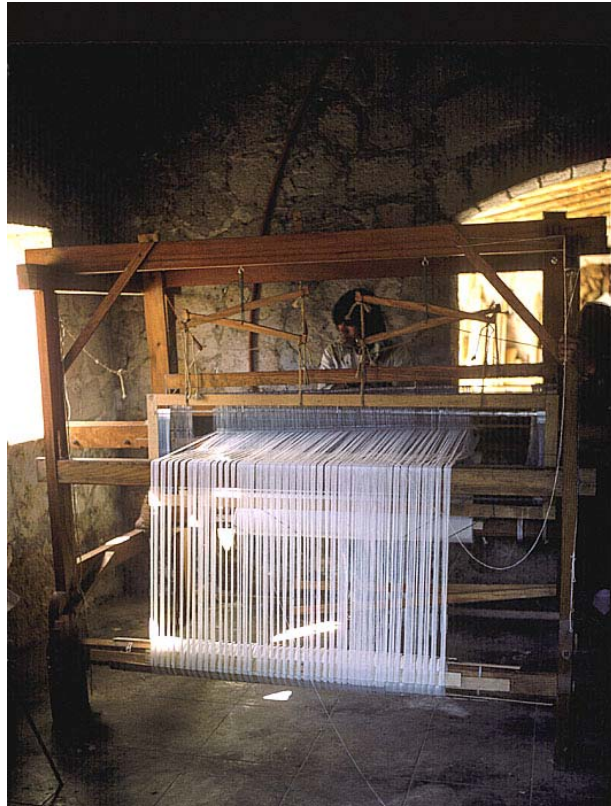


History of the Weaving Workshops

In 1986, the Huichol communities of Santa Catarina and San Andrés petitioned Juan Negrín to seek the necessary funding for the creation of weaving workshops in their communities. At that time, it had been eight years—since 1978—that the Huichol had been unable to purchase the high-quality cotton cloth, known as “manta de primera,” a material essential to the production of the fine embroidery for which they were famous. This “manta” had been produced by a small independent factory in Bella Vista, Nayarit, which was the sole source for the sturdy cotton cloth. When we visited the owners of the factory, they told us they were closing because their only clients were Indians, who would be unable to pay the price necessary for their business to be profitable.



Loom in the San Andrés Weaving Workshop

For the next eight years the highest quality of manta available in Mexico, as well as samples of imported muslin cloth, were given to the Huichol to work with, but none was as suitable for their purposes as the manta from Bella Vista. It was out of this need that the idea for weaving workshops emerged.

ADESMO¹ had already installed carpentry workshops in Santa Catarina and San Andrés, including solar kilns for drying wood,² and the carpenters were advanced enough in their skills to manufacture the looms and other equipment necessary for the production of cloth. ADESMO provided the funding to send a young Huichol from Santa Catarina to study weaving with a master in the State of Michoacan who specialized in the production of manta. Once properly trained, he returned to his community to supervise the construction of the building³ that would house the weaving workshop and the building of the looms by the community’s carpenters. The only items that could not be manufactured in house were the metal parts.

¹ Read more about ADESMO in the biography of Juan Negrín.

² See History of the Carpentry Workshops.

³ ADESMO provided the funding for construction materials in Santa Catarina.

In San Andrés, the community used an existing building for the weaving workshop, and ADESMO hired an Italian, Enzo Lanati, and his English wife Emma, both of whom were expert weavers. Enzo and Emma supervised the community's carpenters in the fabrication of the loom and other equipment, and they provided the initial training of the weavers.



Loom at the Santa Catarina Weaving Workshop

In the end, the cloth produced by the Huichol was superior to that which had been produced in Bella Vista, and it was made available locally at a better price. This eliminated the expense of transportation, lodging, and other costs related to traveling to buy the cloth in nearby towns and cities. The workshops provided the communities with cloth of excellent quality for the manufacture of their traditional everyday clothing. It created

jobs for the Huichol, who often travel to the Pacific Coast to work in tobacco fields where they are exposed to dangerous pesticides, and it also helped them to keep their scarce monetary resources within the community. Perhaps most importantly, it enabled them to continue their tradition of fine embroidery, which could have become a lost art without the availability of suitable cloth with which to work. The weavers found that demand was high, and the cloth sold as fast as it could be produced.

The weaving workshops functioned successfully until 1998, when a combination of factors made it necessary to suspend operations. The Huichol from both communities have been requesting that we provide them with the monetary assistance to resume these programs. In the case of Santa Catarina, all that would be required is \$1,500.00 for the purchase of cotton and basic financial support for the Huichol master weaver who would provide training to the new group. A visit to San Andrés will be necessary in order to make an evaluation of their workshop to determine what would be needed to get them producing again.

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