

GERTRUDE DUBY BLOM, A GREAT PROMOTER OF MAYAN TEXTILES IN THE WORLD

Interesting event co-sponsored by Na Bolom.ch and Pineda Covalin on Mexican art of textiles

Na Bolom.ch honored the Mexican art of textiles in Bern last 16th October with an event that put together the promotion of Mayan handicrafts, which Gertrude Duby Blom (Switzerland 1901, Mexico 1993) wore with pride and elegance during some five decades in Chiapas, as well as the modern way to transmit this heritage with a commercial twist by Mexican designers Pineda Covalin.

No doubt the topic of the occasion attracted a wide public, which reacted happily to both the audio-visual conference on Mayan Cosmo vision on textiles and its influence in Trudi's personality, and the catwalk by Pineda Covalin.

The engaging start to our event was a presentation, by Na Bolom's Vicepresident, Ivonne Meyer, on the life of Gertrude Duby Blom, a committed socialist since adolescent, which included her humanitarian work in Switzerland and in Europe at the time of the irruption of Nazism, and later in life, in Mexico, where Trudi took residence in 1940 transforming herself, as Ivonne told an attentive audience, into a writer, photographer, sociologist and in short, a unique fighter for the respect of our environment leaving behind a legacy which is more and more important in the world.

Few are those who know the colorful personality of the Swiss ecologist and photographer Trudi in Mexico. My conference aimed to divulge the other face of the European woman, who fell in love with the Lacandons and their jungle in 1943 and a decade later preferred to wear huipiles and enaguas (blouses and wraparounds), bags and belts, kaftans and tunics made out of fabrics produced in back strap looms by artisans from Chiapas' highlands. To the amazed eyes of the public in Bern, an array of pictures showed the rich heritage Trudi put together in her daily wardrobe and the sumptuous and regal ones she wore for special events such as inaugurals of her photo expositions or the launching of her many books about the jungle and the Mayan Indians in Mexico.

According to anthropologist Andres Fabregas Puig, textiles are a vital way of resisting the forced colonialism that Indians were subjected to during the times of the Spaniards in the 16th century. Hadn't it been for this sort of expression one would have never known the history of that culture.

Nowadays we are surprised by the revelation that those lovely cosmic designs from the Maya people disguised the transmission of the culture the colonizers tried to suppress. When we see intricate forms of trees and leaves, in reality it was their way to teach each other Indians the agriculture cycle; when we admire the forms of toads and jaguar's paws the message is to respect powerful beings; when we are surprised with a sort of human figures in fact it is the representation of their God Hachakyum or

any other. Repressed they were not at all, and since the Spaniards did not know the culture they couldn't have imagined that those designs were sort of history books to many, says Fabregas Puig.

Having understood the meaning of Mayan cosmovision, Trudi, no doubt, must have fallen in love with the silent resistance their Indian friends conceived in the art of textiles so as not to let their culture disappear; Trudi was a resistant fighter, not only she combated Nazism and ecological destruction, but she also consistently understood and took the side of the victims.

And so, Mexican textiles are nowadays rich in culture and an art of handicraft that continues to incite for their beauty and talented making. It is true that up to the late part of the last millennium most of the textiles were hand made and national products while nowadays globalization has eroded the perseverance of those who insist to preserve their basic instincts of survival. Natural wool, silk and cotton have become sort of jewels in the textile industry because the normal use goes now to synthetic and cheap fabrics; when once textile were produced in back strap looms or pedal ones, today they come from industrial machines. Even sadder the fact that consumers don't value in real terms what they want to buy and bargain the price the original producers tag to their clothes without considering the time, expertise and love the artisans put into every and unique piece of textile they take to the market for sale.

Trudi, the majestic preserver of the Lacandon jungle showed herself wearing fabulous cloths her friends from Chiapas Highlands wove for her and, a "compadre" of her brought for Beti, her tailor, to converted into a dress; lovely and colorful jackets in the royalty color of red and blue, with embroideries so fine no French lace could match, or long tunics which combined a finest wool with silky finishing. Most probably those people who considered Trudi an extravagant lady were envious of her looks!

Following the presentations by Na Bolom.ch, the Pineda-Covalin show came into action under the guidance of Anna Cervantes, CEO of Amity Trading Sarl, Pineda Covalin's Representant in Switzerland. Rocio Covantes, Liz Aquino and Isabel Zeller, from Bern, and Ale Vera and Minerva Schneider-Corona (Na Bolom.ch Communications head), from Geneva, attracted everyone's eyes during their runway posing magnificent silk scarfs with various ethnic designs from Mexico; not only Mayan but Huichol, Aztec, Olmec, Totonac, Purepecha, Nahua, Otomí and many others; a carnival of color and grace, a piece of clothing that transform itself to the envy of the porter: from a classic scarf for one's neck to a wonderful tunic or, even more spectacular, a huipil of modern allure or a beautiful bow to top your head. Pineda Covalin products leave everyone with a taste for more, and more you can get: bags, jewelry, decorations and dresses.

The evening at the Casino of Bern came to an end with the long awaited lottery; the precious price was nothing else but a Pineda-Covalin scarf with a Huichil design donated to Na Bolom.ch by Amity Trading Sarl, won by Monica Ferrari, of Bern.

Many thanks to all who came to the event and to Na Bolom.ch Executive Committee members Ivonne Meyer, Isabel Campus and Nuria Font de Berlioz who organized it, and the models of Anna Cervantes who worked with love and professional skills.

Kyra Núñez-Johnsson
President

