

Celebrating cultural pride in our community

Vibrantly colorful, richly detailed, joyous, thought-provoking and life-affirming, the Sharpsteen Museum's new exhibit, *Cosas de Nuestra Casa / Things from Our Home* celebrates Calistoga's Mexican heritage through everyday objects brought from their literal and figurative home by members of our community. Some themes woven through this exhibit are tradition passed from one generation to the next, and pride in the ancestral crafts typifying the Mexican states where our exhibitors' families come from. We asked some members of the exhibit team to tell us how this came together.

Eden Umble, Special Exhibits Chair: "I lucked out in every way with my first special exhibit for the Museum. Kathy Bazzoli, the Sharpsteen's passionate resident historian and expert in all aspects of the museum, and I were kicking around ideas for possible exhibits, and when she suggested the next exhibit focus on Mexican heritage, that was it; I thought the idea and timing were perfect. As it's not my cultural background, I worked with a team of amazing people to shape the themes to be explored, and keep this rooted in the Mexican community. Placido Garcia Hernandez, Julia Garcia and Irais Lopez-Ortega were amazingly dedicated, creative and tireless in making this project come alive in the most beautiful and authentic way. We're very proud of the results, and excited to share this with everyone."

For Irais Lopez-Ortega, this was an opportunity to share the artistic glories of her home state of Oaxaca, including a spectacular family heirloom. A highlight of the exhibit is a lavishly embroidered top and skirt made of wine-colored velvet. Huge orange and yellow flowers, along with smaller rows of lilies, star-shaped blooms, some outlined with golden threads for a touch of dazzle, adorn the two-piece dress, sized for a young woman. It is a breathtaking labor of love; anyone who's handled an embroidery needle can recognize the skill on display here. Like a couture gown, one glance tells you hundreds of hours have been painstakingly spent creating this garment. The story behind it is even more amazing.

When Irais' daughter Viri was born in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, in 1983, Viri's great-grandmother Francisca Espinoza began embroidering this dress for her great-granddaughter. The work took about 3 years, and Francisca kept the dress for Viri for three decades. Irais returned to Oaxaca and brought the dress back to her daughter. While Viri never met her great-grandmother, this traditional garment is a

living testament to familial love between generations. It signifies hope, faith, and continuity. It celebrates the artistic traditions for which Oaxaca is known – ornate embroidery and barro negro pottery among them.

Julia Garcia tapped friends & family for their artifacts, and shared some personal ones which go way back in her own life. As a very young woman, she was taught embroidery by her mother. The floral napkins she made, with their clean, precise cross-stitches, had to be as orderly and neat on the back as on the front. The work she made is displayed with both sides revealed, proof of her attention to the details which matter.

On the recommendation of Sharpsteen veteran Kent Domogalla, Placido Garcia Hernandez called his old friend Carlos Renteria to ask about examples of the Charro culture. Renteria welcomed Hernandez & Umble to his home, sharing his magnificent saddle & tack, charro suit with horsehead details, sombrero, suede boots, colorful serapes, and even took family photos off the wall to demonstrate his illustrious history in Calistoga and Napa Valley over five decades. He's proud of his many trophies which attest to his excellence in horsemanship and cultural details in parades and events throughout the valley.

Above all, this exhibit seeks to inspire. As Lopez-Ortega says, "It's great that the Hispanic members get recognized as members of our community, and to share and show the cultural background for each of us. I'm very proud that I was able to keep the family traditions and show them to my kids, and for them to share it with their own kids." Placido Garcia Hernandez says, "I feel very proud the museum decided to put on this exhibit at this time. It shows the mix of cultures, a very good blend of different regions into one country where many of us were born. Calistoga has a high percentage of Latinos, and I think this exhibit will help us understand each other. We've got art, pride, a culture that's alive and colorful, traditions that go back many generations."

The exhibit will be on display through October 2022.

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