

—JUAN HORTA CASTILLO—

Juan Horta Castillo is one of the best traditional mask makers in Mexico. He has exhibited his art throughout Mexico and the United States. His masks were selected by the Ballet Folklórico de México, and are featured in their world-wide performances. He is a multiple first prize winner of Mexico's National Mask Maker competition. El Museo de la Mascara in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, exhibits his masks as part of their permanent collection. Don Juan has also been a featured artist at the Art Institute of Chicago, Rhode Island School of Design and many colleges, schools and cultural centers throughout the United States.



MASKED DANCES—

Masked dances are usually performed on 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. Masks are usually worn only by men, who impersonate female characters as will. 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 mayordomo, 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 usually accompany the dancers. Each village usually holds one major fiesta a year, which serves as its source of community pride and status.

The majority of the masks in this exhibit are from the Pastorelas Dance and the Viejitos Dance. The main fiesta in Juan's village is celebrated on February 2 which is celebrated throughout Latin America as the Candelaria Feast Day.

MASK MAKERS—

The work of the masquerero or professional maskmaker may more strongly reflect native traditions and dances. It is likely that the masquerero inherited the profession from his father and has had less formal training than the santero. He works with materials locally available and his pieces are more reasonably priced.

Masks vary in size from a few inches to over three feet; however, most are life-sized to fit over the face of the wearer. The majority of masks are carved of wood with copalillo, zompante or colorín, a light, soft wood. In some villages, wood must be cut at what is considered a proper time of year, or during a full or waning moon.

Occasionally masks are made of other materials, such as leather (pounded over a stone or wooden mold), clay, wax, gourd, and more rarely, wire mesh, silver, tin, or turtle shell.

After carving—with tools such as a machete, hand saw, knife, chisel, and gouge—the masks are smoothed with sandpaper and then brightly painted. Colored earth, minerals, or plants traditionally were used for the pigments, but today varnished enamel, aniline, and oil paints are more common. Additional materials are also used to embellish the masks, including glass eyes, human or animal teeth, wild boar bristles, horsehair, deer antlers, cow or goat horns, woolen tassels, bells, ribbons, tinfoil, leather, plant fiber, pochote tree spines, fur, armadillo hide, snakeskin, gourds, and animal claws.

Because masks are intended to be worn, certain practical requirements must be considered. The inner surface of the mask must be well-smoothed or covered with cloth for the comfort of the dancer. Breathing holes and eye holes also are added. Holes are often drilled at the sides and top of the mask for the attachment of wearing cords. Cords, made of leather, ixtle fiber from the maguey plant, straw, or cloth, are attached across the back and over the top of the head. Some masks, however, are simply held in front of the face with the hands.

In some areas, the masks themselves are believed to contain great power, and certain taboos often must be observed during their making and wearing. If these behavioral rules are broken, the masks may inflict severe punishment. Some masks are also believed able to move or blink their eyes on their own. Treasured older masks are frequently repaired with nails, metal strips, or glue, and are repainted many times to freshen their color.



Juan and his son working
in their home in Tocuaro,
Michoacan



ARTIST PRESENTATION—

On the day of the visit, Juan will demonstrate how to carve a traditional mask using a machete, 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. The purpose of this day long visit is to expose students to this unique country. They will be presented with many facets of life in Mexico. This experience will allow them to meet and talk with a Mexican folk artist. 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 this “cultural ambassador”.

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

All sessions will be led by Pat Picciano, the sponsor and translator for Juan’s visit. Pat has led numerous presentations on Latin American craft. Over the past 15 years he has visited schools, universities, museums and libraries allowing thousands of people to observe and marvel at talented artisans as they demonstrate their unique art forms.



SITE PREPARATION FOR GUEST ARTIST

- * Provide a suitable space for artist(s) 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 2 chairs
- * Schedule no more than 5 45 minute sessions(4 hours total contact time)
- * You may videotape all activities for future references

STUDENT ACTIVITIES—

Please read enclosed material to familiarize yourself with Mexico and Juan's art form.

- * 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.
- * Have students suggest a variety of themes and/or characters that could be represented by a mask that they could make.
- * On the day of the artist's visit observe the display of crafts.
- * Prepare questions for the artist.

VOCABULARY

mascara- mask	pueblo- village, people
ojo- eye	comida- food
boca- mouth	fiesta- party, festival
nariz- nose	campo- field
frijoles- beans	campesino- field worker
tortillas- ground corn patty	maestro- teacher, master craftsman
hijos- children in the same family	
nino- child	Buenos dias- Good morning
muchacho- boy	Buenas tardes- Good afternoon
muchacha- girl	Como está Usted?- How are you?
toro- bull	Que pasa?- What's happening?
madera- wood	De donde viene Usted?- Where are you from?
herramienta- tool	Hasta luego- Until then; later
machete- large heavy knife	Hasta la vista- See you later
casa- house	
artesanía- folk art, craft	

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SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION–

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?

FOLK ART- A traditional or primitive art form often passed on within a localized community, within a family or practiced by self taught artists is considered folk art.

- Can you think of some examples of American folk art?
- Why might some cultures have a greater variety of folk art than others?
- Are there skills passed on within your community or family?

APPRENTICESHIP- An apprenticeship is the time spent learning a craft under a skilled master. The techniques used in the production of folk art in Mexico is still passed on in this way.

- How do we in the United States learn a skill or craft?
- What might be an advantage of having only one teacher?
- What are other ways of learning about a topic or skill?

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 artist(s) 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?

FIESTAS- A fiesta is a party or festival that is celebrated in Mexico. Many fiestas require the preparation and participation of a whole village to carry on a three or four day celebration. Live music is always present during a fiesta. Many fiestas can include such activities as, a dance, rodeo, fire works display, mask play, religious service or craft fair.

- What are some examples of holidays or festivals that we celebrate?
- What are some activities we might participate in during one of our festivals?
- What would be some reasons for celebrating?

MASKS- A mask is an object used to conceal or disguise the face. In Mexico, masks have played an important part in the social, religious, and recreational lives of people since pre-Columbian times. In the past, masks were worn in ritual dances and used by dancers to represent person or animals.

- What kinds of material could be used to make masks?
- What are some of the occasions when we would wear masks?
- Can you name other countries that use masks in celebrations?

Papier Mâché Mask

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.

