

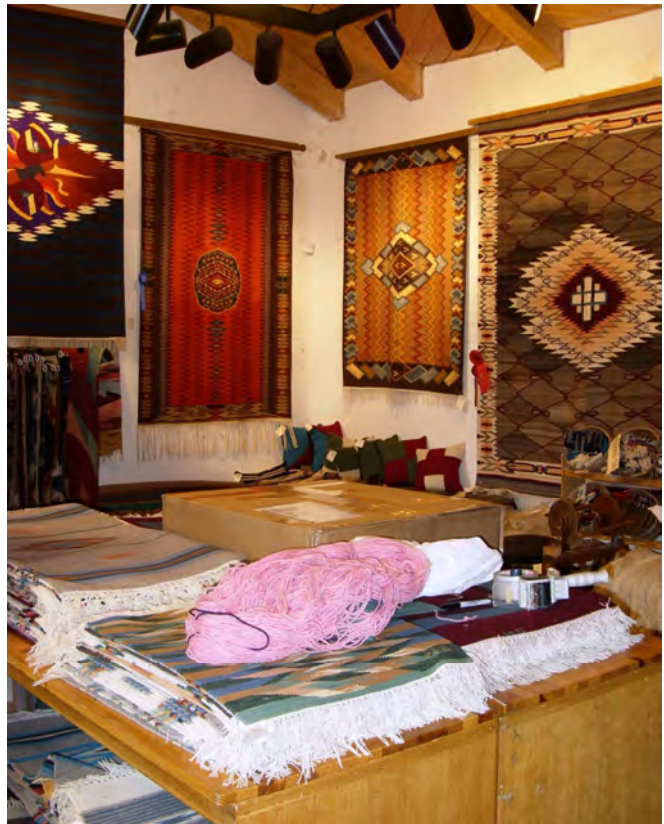
New Mexico's Fiber Arts Trails: Site 8 – Centinela Traditional Arts

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This is the second of several short articles about my trip to New Mexico in December 2009. I hope it will inspire others to add similar articles about their travels to the MAFA Library.

The New Mexico Fiber Arts Trails brochures (www.nmfiberarts.org) describe three loop trails, which are characterized as North Central, Northwest, and South. All but one of the stops I made on my trip are on the North Central Trail.

According to Mapquest, Chimayó is 90 miles and 1 hour 39 minutes northeast of Albuquerque. While there are 5 stops on the Fiber Trail in this area, I had to pick *just one*. My husband, who is decidedly NOT into fiber arts, had agreed to spend a day driving the Fiber Trail from Santa Fe to Taos and back, and there simply wasn't enough time in the day to do everything. I selected Centinela Traditional Arts—thereby stumbling by sheer dumb luck into the selection I would have made had I actually done some research ahead of time (which I hadn't).





Loom with a tapestry in progress. Irvin's Professional Engineer certificate hangs on the wall behind the loom. I realized only recently that there were no signs of cartoons or sketches anywhere; I really should have asked questions about the design process!

I had thought the visit wouldn't take me long—I'd run in, persuade a salesclerk to let me take a few photos as part of my pre-Convergence scouting expedition, and dash out again. I suppose I was anticipating either one of those pretentious art galleries where I couldn't afford anything even if I wanted it or one of those hard-sell Turkish or Moroccan pseudo-*sugs*. Instead, I found a perfectly lovely store. Yes, they did have little mug rugs with chili-peppers-arranged-in-the-shape-of-a-heart, nicely executed but still uncomfortably akin to some horrors I saw in Old Town Albuquerque. BUT there

were also stylish vests and woven accessories, traditional rugs,...and heart-rendingly beautiful tapestries that reveal that the Rio Grande weaving tradition is vibrantly alive and evolving.



Irvin's really big loom. Lisa thinks it's a 12-foot weaving with. Sheds are changed with a modified electric garage door opener.

There was also a real live working studio, which owner Lisa Trujillo enthusiastically showed to me. I did not take nearly as many photos as I would have liked; I was too enthralled talking to Lisa.



Warps are wound sectionally from a creel over a ceiling hook, through a tension box, and onto an industry-style warping wheel. The warp is then wound from the wheel onto a warp beam, which is held on brackets in front of the wheel. The warp for multiple tapestries is put on the beam at the same time. In the photos, the creel is rotated 90 degrees to allow access to the room; when in use, it would be parallel to the wheel. The warping wheel is HUGE!

In addition to being a weaver, Lisa also handles the business side of Centinela Traditional Arts. When I first arrived, she had just finished packing up an order destined for Japan. Since I also have a business degree, we soon found ourselves chatting about a good many things. Two topics in particular stick in my mind. First, Lisa noted how important market expansion and diversification was in her business. There is a famous restaurant in Chimayó that was closed for about a year following a fire; with the restaurant closed, the bus tours to the area practically ceased. (*aha!* "tour buses"—that explains the chili-pepper hearts.) However, the business—and the weavers it supports—was able to manage because it also sells textiles to the fashion industry. The other memorable topic involved a segue from gossiping about the



Assorted equipment (including Lisa's "real" walking loom and her "for fun" 4-shaft workshop loom) has crept into nooks and crannies in the gallery. This bulky head spinner is powered by a sewing machine motor.

work the next day at Santa Fe's Museum of International Folk Art. The museum has an exhibit dedicated to the works of New Mexico's National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellows. You can read an interview with Irvin at <http://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/interview.php?id=200711>

personalities on the WeaveTech Yahoo group to discussing the eccentricities of weavers in general. Lisa mused that her job sometimes can feel like social work; alcoholism can interfere with work being completed and delivered to her; one of her weavers, who is diabetic, recently had to have some toes amputated, something that perhaps could have been avoided if they could have found a way to fund medical treatment in time.

It took me a while to put the pieces together, and I may well have made some incorrect inferences. Certainly, no one I spoke to ever said anything about poverty, or jobs, or economic development. But it occurs to me that what Centinela Traditional Arts, Española Valley Fiber Arts Center, and other New Mexico businesses and organizations are doing is very similar to what many charities are doing in Guatemala, Thailand, and other Third World countries. They are trying to create markets for traditional arts and crafts so that people can make a living while still keeping traditions alive.

Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to meet Lisa's husband Irvin, who was out shopping with one of their children. However, I did get to admire his



Hand-cranked bicycle-wheel bobbin winder

Navigation Tip: My GPS (a Magellan Maestro 4250) would not allow me to enter the street number for Centinela Traditional Arts, insisting that the numbers for NM-76 stop in the 700s. Fortunately, there are signs.