

Mexican Folk Art

Guillermina Aguilar Alcántara: The Clay in Ocotlán

At the entrance of Ocotlán are the houses of the four Aguilar sisters: Irene, Josefina, Concepción and Guillermina. The colorful facades and some clay pieces welcome visitors who come to this picturesque town to learn about the work and skills of this prodigious family, a family that must be known.

Guillermina is the oldest of her sisters. She learned the art of sculpting clay with great dexterity and skill, as did her sisters, from her parents; Isaura Alcantara Diaz and Jesus Aguilar. In the town, the pieces made were utilitarian, that is, they were used in the kitchen or in the garden. These pieces didn't have a great economic value, although they did have an aesthetic value. Guillermina's parents decided to innovate with forms and themes and were the pioneers in this tradition. Their main theme was to capture the daily life in Ocotlán where women were the main protagonists.

Guillermina is celebrating 50 years of modeling clay and doing it with all her passion. The last few years have been difficult for her as she is slowly losing sight in one of her eyes. Even though she has had several operations to try and recover her vision, she is always optimistic and happy.

In her conversations, she says that losing a little bit of sight is not a problem because it is the hands and the heart that works with the clay. She says: “what matters is the hands, they tell me what to do and how to do it”.

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Guillermina has been very interested in capturing the beauty of the traditional dress of the different cultural regions of Oaxaca in her art. With this idea in mind, many years ago, she received a book about the life and work of Frida Kahlo. This book has been her great inspiration since she has recreated more than 200 of Frida's dresses. Guillermina believes that it not only recreates the way in which Frida dressed, but also helps those interested in her art to show the beauty and cultural diversity of Oaxaca.



Guillermina Aguilar Alcántara, Fridas, 1997
Ocotlán de Morelos, Oaxaca, México Col.
Fomento Cultural Banamex, A. C.
Photo: Édgar Espinoza Ulloa Mondragón

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Another great motivation for Guillermina is the market day in Ocotlán de Morelos. Every Friday is a day of celebration. The market is the soul of Ocotlán, and has served as a source of motivation for other artists like Rodolfo Morales. On this day, it is possible to find crafts, hats, huaraches, tepache, mezcals, textiles and a delicious gastronomy.

The flavors and colors of the market are present in Guillermina's work. It also showcases the spirit of the ex-convent, Santo Domingo de Guzmán and its colors, the town's festivities such as carnival and also the celebrations such as baptisms and weddings which are held in the church.

One day Guillermina told me about the great friendship she had with Rodolfo Morales and the trips they made together through Israel, England and Germany, among others. Her works have crossed borders and can be found in very important museums.

Guillermina's work can be seen at the Museo de Arte Popular which is in front of the Mejorada park, and at the Museo de Arte Popular in Mexico City. Her beautiful works of polychrome and polished clay have also traveled to exhibitions in the United States. Her pieces have won international awards and recognition from locals and foreigners alike.

Guillermina Aguilar was named the Grand Master of Folk Art by Fomento Cultural Banamex and Ambassador of the Mexico brand in 2005.

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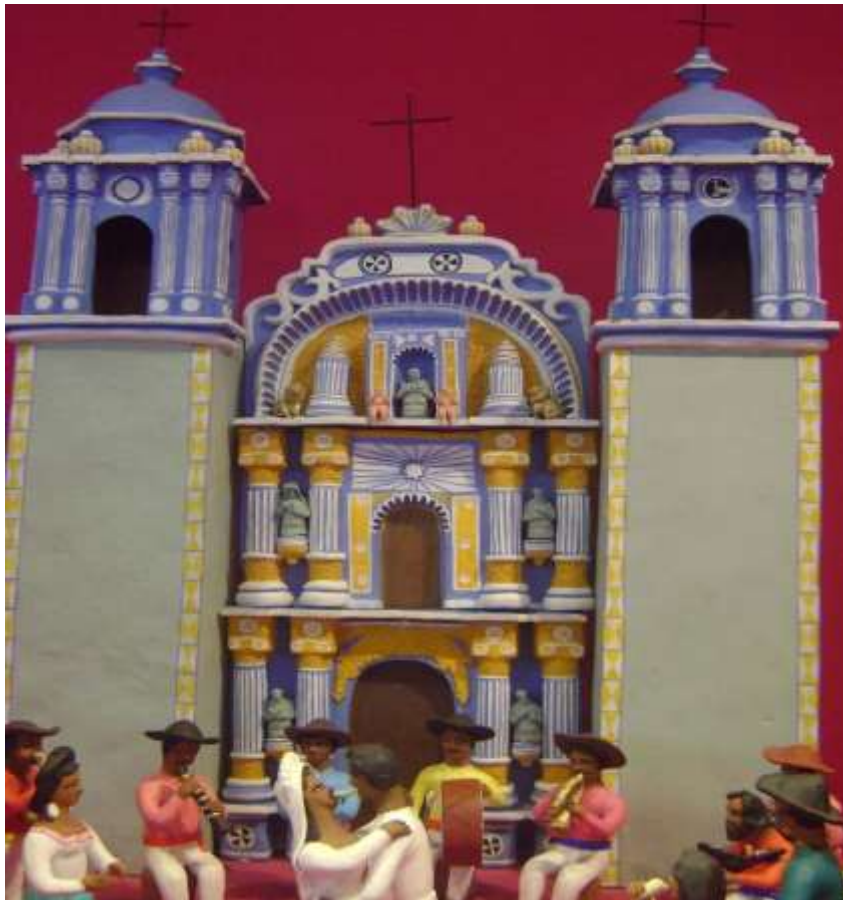


It is a great joy to visit Guillermina. She always has wise words to share, as well as fantastic stories of her childhood and adulthood and it's amazing to enjoy her pieces which exhibit an extraordinary delicacy and expressiveness.

In one of these long conversations I have had with Guillermina, she told me that she could not read. She told me that since she was a child, she had not found any satisfaction in going to school and that this had not stopped her from building and fulfilling her dreams. Her dreams have been to travel the world, conquer her own fears, and as a woman develop her great potential as an artist. And she has achieved it.

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Guillermina not only models clay, she also models life and a kinder future for her family. Heiress of a wonderful gift, she knows how to motivate her children to learn from tradition and be worthy ambassadors of Ocotlán. Three of her children are expert potters and present their works in the best exhibitions of Folk Art.



Church wedding in Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Ocotlán
Guillermina Aguilar Alcántara

Guillermina has a dream. She wants to be immortal. Her extraordinary philosophy of life and her generosity make it possible. Every word she shares makes me reflect on what a great woman she is.

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Mexican Folk Art

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