

Mexico's Embroidered Huipiles

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In Mexican culture, clothing such as the Huipil, a traditional and popular embroidered garment worn among Mexican and Central Americans has been an important piece in connection to Mayan culture. The Huipil is an everyday garment used among women, but can also be reserved for ceremonies or special occasions. However, my item of choice has been a modern take on a Huipil. The modern Huipil is an embroidered dress with the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Mexican nation's patron saint. Much like a traditional huipil, my dress is reserved for a special occasion, known as Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe is held every year on December 12 in which we honor the first appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico. The Huipil, having similarities with Mayan culture can be reflected through the work artisans place when making the huipil. Reflecting honored traditions and beliefs.

To begin, the word Huipil comes from the Nahuatl(Uto-Aztec language) word, Huīpīlli, meaning "my covering". Huipil clothing has been popular among Mexico and Central America, among most popular with women and indigenous groups. Typically the Huipil consists of heavily embroidered designs or simple ones which we can often see on blouses, dresses and/or skirts. The Huipil has held connections within the Mayan culture, who held strongly to the tradition of textile production. Since the year 2600 B.C, the Mayans were taught to spin plant fabrics into yarn and weave them into textiles by the goddess, Ix Chel. Goddess of the moon and earth. (Alex, 2019). In Mayan culture, the Huipil was among the most traditional garments, often featuring symbolic patterns and images. Additionally, for Mexican culture the Huipil endured through the Spanish conquest and during its time combined European elements such as yoked blouses, a European shaped pattern garment piece that fit around the neck and shoulders and was simple. However, it has since evolved where patterns are much more complex. Huipil today are made of commercial cloth, while most traditional ones are made of handwoven fabric made on a back strap loom. Which can often take months to create

by its artisans. Evidently, the Huipil has been around for centuries symbolizing one's interests, family, martial and social status, religion and beliefs. The type of design embroidered into a Huipil can display more about that person. For example, colors can display a set of mood or prosperity. Colors such as blue, red, white, yellow and green can display energy and spirituality. Whereas black represents death or nighttime. Adding on, woven designs can identify what type of community they come from. Such designs relate to the natural world which is usually agricultural societies, where they come from. And if you came from a higher social status, your Huipil may consist of ruffles, lace collars, gold fringes and silk scarves.

Additionally, modern embroidered pieces of clothing have been popular as its cultural roots uncover Mexican unique traditions. Embroidered clothing was first initiated when Otomi (Indigenous people of Mexico inhabiting central Mexican plateau) communities suffered an economic crisis in the 1960's caused by severe drought in their farming region. In order to have a source of income, embroidered clothing was set up and held an important part to their economic and traditional activities. "Weaving is an important source of income as that from agriculture is not enough to meet most families' needs." (Alex, 2019) Similarly to recent times where Mexican artisans often sell their work in exchange for money or food as they are demanded outside their communities. Still, modern embroidered clothing is either manufactured or done by hand. Made up of cotton, dyes and natural fibers. Much like the Mayans, Huipil and embroidered clothing reflected themes of history, personal identity, spirituality and cosmological philosophy. While also indicating one's ethnicity and community. In my modern dress, it expresses my religion and ethnicity by reflecting honored traditions. My dress is made up of a thick black cloth material with embroidery everywhere. The embroidery included are flowers with its main piece being the Virgin of Guadalupe. According to the Mayans, flowers in Huipil clothing symbolize life and fertility. As both my religion and culture show during its special ceremony, 12 de Diciembre (The twelve of December) otherwise known as Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe (Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe).

In Mexican culture, Catholic Christianity is the dominant religion. Which can be traced back to the Conquest of Mexico from 1519-21. From this event, religious syncretism occurred between the Aztecs and Spanish conquistadors. Today in Plaza de

Zocalo, Mexico City there is a church named Metropolitan Cathedral, the center for Mexican Catholicism. However, it once served as a center to Aztec belief which was a temple burned down by the Spanish. As brutal as the conversion was, many indigenous people were left but to convert willingly as they were unprepared to resist against the Spanish. However, over time indigenous people became accepting of Catholicism as they saw similarities within their Aztec religion. Through strong priestly class with a hierarchical structure and shared similar symbols and rituals. For most, el Dia de la Virgen Guadalupe celebrated on December 12 is a celebration made to honor the first appearance of the Virgin Guadalupe. Made to Juan Diego, an indigenous man in Mexico City, 1531. This ceremony is often filled with joy and celebration. Typically by attending church at 12AM or 5AM, to sing las mañanitas to the Virgen de Guadalupe, otherwise known as a traditional Mexican happy birthday song. This song is sung as every year it's considered like a birthday since her arrival to Mexico. Next, over the weekend, celebrations and processions can be held outside the church, and out the streets with chants "Que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!" and "Que viva Mexico!" along with music. Typically, in these events you'd see women dress up in embroidered shirts, dresses as well as children. Commonly a girl would be seen head to toe in an embroidered shirt and long shirt with stitching of the Virgen all over, either in colorful or colors of the Mexican flag. Next, boys would be dressed up as Juan Diego. The indigenous man who encountered the Virgin of Guadalupe. The outfits for the boys would be more traditional like a Huipil, lightweight cotton material with minimal embroidered patterns while women have more of a modern take. Most of these outfits can be bought at traditional mexican clothing stores. In respect to our indigenous culture and Spanish conquistadors the Huipil, where most elements arose from had a connection to the Virgin of Guadalupe. In images, she is portrayed in European style but with dark skin. Where she is seen standing on a moon and sun, which were special elements in Aztec religion.

Personally for me I go to Elmhurst/Corona, Queens. Typically the pricing ranges from \$30 to even a couple hundred dollars, depending on the details. However, for my embroidered dress I purchased it in an Artisan Convention held in Brooklyn. It was in a rented building where many Artisan men and women put out to display their clothing,

jewelry and decor. As I kept making my laps around trying to figure out what I wanted the embroidery of the Virgen Guadalupe and its bright colored flowers grabbed my attention. This was back in November 2019, as December 12 was coming up I just knew I had to get this piece. Clothing whether it be traditional or modern holds significance during this celebration. When dressing in Huipil or Embroidered clothing, the bright colors symbolize an offering of gratitude, respect and honor to the Virgen de Guadalupe. As we believe her to be a powerful symbol of Mexican identity, faith and unity. Her significance can be traced back to her appearance which was believed to be a miracle and therefore, we believe she's capable of making miracles in our lives.

In conclusion, my embroidered dress holds significant importance to my Mexican and religious identity. My embroidered dress has shown the time and dedication artisans put into their work while honoring tradition. Since the adaptation of weaving with the traditional backstrap loom, weavings have changed. Where Huipils range from different types of threads or designs used. As time goes by, new trends will have to be made. Where older ones would either be sold at markets for extra income or used as decorative pieces at home in tables or chairs. In sum, my modern Huipil is more than just a garment with greater detail, but a piece of clothing that shows who I believe in and how I'm choosing to honor her. Over the research aspect of this project, I had not been aware that Central American countries also wore Huipil. Nonetheless, owning a traditional and modern piece of Huipil made me understand the thought into choosing the right colors and patterns.

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