



Renata Schneider\*

## One Huipil a Day

▲ Detail of a Mixtec huipil neckline; hand-embroidered ribbon with mercerized cotton, sewn onto silk. Santiago Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.

**U**n huipil al día (One Huipil a Day) is a project to disseminate Mexico's traditional weaves and clothing, as well as those of Latin America, the United States, and Canada. The aim is to demonstrate the technical, stylistic, and world-view connections among these works, whether ancient or modern, throughout the hemisphere.

The project publishes the image of an entire piece of clothing or a fragment of one every day on social networks like Facebook, WordPress, and Instagram. The image is accompanied by a brief explanation of the kind of garment it is, who made it (if the information is available), the ethnic group or textile tradition it belongs to, the technique used, and the photographer's name.<sup>1</sup>

The aim is to recognize, demonstrate, and identify the aesthetic of our country's groups and locations, as well as differentiate between the pieces made for sale outside the communities and those that are for "internal consumption," including those made to be worn by their creators.

"Un huipil al día" reports if the garments were made using pre-Colombian techniques, such as the back-strap loom for making *huipiles* (lengths of cloth sewn together at the sides, slipped over the head and worn as a top) or *enredos* (long lengths

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of cloth wrapped around the body as a skirt), or if they used certain coloring agents (the extract of the cochineal grain, the dyes made from certain flowers, or the purple sea snails, just to name a few). Techniques may also date from colonial times, like the use of patterns for making blouses and skirts, or the modern era, as in the case of the mixed pieces worn in many places in Mexico's North, where today they prefer hand- or machine-sewn garments made out of commercial fabric in bright colors.

The project is collaborative and anyone can send in an image of a detail, a piece of fabric, or a garment for day-to-day, festive, or ceremonial wear, to be shared after a brief edition. The only requirement is that the full garments be photographed after ironing, against a smooth background, with high resolution.

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▲ Detail of a Purépecha/mestiza napkin for public sale; cotton fabric hand-embroidered with cotton thread. Tzintzuntzan, Michoacán, Mexico. Photo: Edith Merino.

Each platform has its own characteristics and its own audience. Until now, the most popular is Facebook, and the project page has almost 10 000 followers. However—and this may be more interesting—the very heart of the project is the blog on the WordPress platform, since it functions as a very simple data base. There, you can do a search, let’s say, from Google, for examples of Chinantec garments (typing “un huipil al día + chinanteco”), and you’ll get a kind of visual library that will allow you to compare textiles from that Oaxacan group.

The combinations in the search engine can be done by garment (“un huipil al día + quexqemetl” or “un huipil al día + lienzo,” for example) to see the similarities and differences among them and among those throughout the country, or, if we have examples from other countries, throughout the hemisphere. The search can be done by state, municipality, country, or a single locale (“un huipil al día + Zinacantán,” “un huipil al día + Santa Teresa del Nayar,” or “un huipil al día + Puebla,” “un huipil al día + Brasil,” etc.). Also, on the WordPress base page is a mosaic of all the pieces. Almost 1 000 have been shared since January 25, 2017, when the project was launched.

## Where Are They From?

Pieces often come from collections, expositions, or historical collections, allowing us to observe the evolution of



▲ Detail of a Mixtec man’s sash; industrial cotton woven on a back-strap loom. Hand-woven cotton ends, probably colored with dye made from sea-snail, have been added. San Pedro Jicayán, Jamiltepec, Oaxaca, Mexico (Oaxaca Textile Museum). Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Detail of a Q’eqchi’ huipil; synthetic fabric hand-embroidered with cotton thread. Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Wichi bag (or yica); chaguar (*Bromelia hieronymi*) fibers dyed with root extracts, beads made from palo santo (*Bursera graveolens*) wood, and feathers. The yica often has a strap, but here, the strap has been lost. Gaona, Anta, Salta, Argentina. Photo: R. Schneider.

a kind of garment over time, as well as the stylistic variations (including the incorporation of contemporary materials or techniques) of the community clothing from a specific town or region. I have been very lucky to have been able to photograph pieces from the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples Collection, from the Maya World Textile Center, the Museum of Popular Art, the Textile Museum of Oaxaca, and the Ixchel Museum of Indigenous Clothing of Guatemala, among others. Clearly, textiles are without a doubt one of the most important leading items in the vast folk art tradition, even more important than other everyday objects that share techniques and influences in the Americas (such as basket-weaving, ceramics, etc.).

I should underline that the project has received contributions from the artisans themselves, who have become familiar with the platform and understand that its aim is not commercial, but to disseminate the art. This has enriched its content enormously. Whenever possible, I ask



Pieces often come from collections, expositions, or historical collections, allowing us to observe the evolution of a kind of garment over time.

▲ Detail of a Totonac blouse; hand-embroidered cotton broadcloth, made around 1980 (those of today are very similar). Papantla de Olarte, Veracruz, Mexico (Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection). Photo: R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.

them to tell us about the elements of their understanding of the universe that are displayed on the clothing.

### Where the Genders Converge

Disseminating women's work, traditionally done in the countryside after hours of agricultural labor and housework, often only for self-consumption, is well worth doing. Nevertheless, clothing for day-to-day or festive wear is also done by males, who make shawls on pedal looms or sisal shoulder bags on back-strap looms. They weave and embroider, just like the women, in their free time or full time, and some are organized in cooperatives when it is in their interest. In all cases, if we have that information, or data about when the pieces were made, we include it. Plus, we indicate whether a kind of garment is no longer in use, tracing when that happened if the information is available.

On occasion, pieces arrive and their origin or the technique used to make them is unclear. Bibliographical research has been fundamental for dealing with this, and it is always gratifying to discover the many publications that



▲ Detail of a Tzotzil coat; wool dyed with *chiate* and black earth; woven on a back-strap loom and hand embroidered with cotton thread. This garment is not traditionally worn by men or women in this Tzotzil location; for many years, the pieces have been made exclusively for sale. San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo: Sofia Durand.



▲ Ceremonial Tlingit spread; cedar bark fibers, goat wool and sinews; made about 1870. Southeastern coast of Alaska, United States (Quai Branly Museum, Paris, France). Photo: R. Schneider.

offer information about traditional clothing. In addition to written sources and the help of specialists like Octavio Murillo or Karla Pérez, who are always ready to come to my rescue, it has been wonderful to see how a collaborative network has taken shape through the comments, clarifications, and even scoldings received from site followers. In fact, the thirteen photographs that accompany this short article were selected expressly by platform visitors after a brief survey.

### A Field of Debate We Need

When I began this project, my intention was just to learn about a topic that I'm passionate about. So, I thought that publishing one piece a day would be a discipline that would allow me to increase my meager knowledge about the matter. Now I feel that I know less than before, but the enthusiasm for discovering and attempting to project the differences in taste between one group and another that essentially identify them has not diminished.

The demands of globalization vs. the demands of the hemisphere's First Peoples about their territory and political, economic, and cultural rights have created a field of debate that we must pay attention to and analyze. Curiously, thanks to this project, I have witnessed the discussions about issues like cultural appropriation and design theft, indiscriminate commercialization of pieces made as "souvenirs," or the textiles of some regions becoming something for the elites. I do not consider myself a special-



▲ Nayeri (Cora) skirt with apron; commercial fabric cut and machine-sewn by Primitiva Rodríguez. Santa Teresa del Nayar, El Nayar, Nayarit, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.

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▲ Tepehua blouse; cotton broadcloth and gingham hand- and machine-embroidered with cotton thread; made about 1990 (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.



▲ Otomí blouse made by Dominga Gutiérrez. Santiago Mexquititlán, Amealco, Querétaro, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Tepehua *tapún* (*quexquemetl*), or slip-on triangular ceremonial covering; cotton and wool woven on a strap-back loom using muslin and brocade techniques in about 1960 (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo: R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.

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▲ Otomí bag for incense; hand-spun cotton and wool, woven on a back-strap loom using double fabric technique in the nineteenth century (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo: Michel Zabé, courtesy of INPI.

ist in any of these fields, and what has seemed appropriate to me is to observe and pay attention fundamentally to the points of view of the women and men artisans who make the pieces—and in most cases wear them. Even though they have no single viewpoint or common form of organization, like with their clothing, these depend, among other things, on a specific world-view and the bio-cultural resources available in their territories, as well as on the social and economic conditions, or their kind of integration and mobilization, which is different for every group.

Celebrating that difference, celebrating the ways in which each culture decides to identify itself and the ways that each weaves networks and collaborates to achieve their rights, is perhaps the best way to honor them from outside. This project seeks to do that by making the clothing visible, showing that the garments are not trivial, a frivolity, but the clearest representation—since they are visual—of a kind of cultural resistance. **MM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Un huipil al día” is available on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Un-huipil-al-d%C3%ADa-456338117823196/>), Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/unhuipil\\_aldia/?hl=es-la](https://www.instagram.com/unhuipil_aldia/?hl=es-la)), and WordPress (<https://unhuipil.wordpress.com/home/>). [Editor’s Note.]