

Santa Fe, USA

Artists Working Together: Santa Fe, New Mexico and Trinidad, Cuba

Santa Fe, New Mexico, a small city of 87,500 people in the United States, has been a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network since 2005. The arts and cultural industries are one of the main drivers of Santa Fe's economy, creating jobs, attracting capital, generating taxes and enhancing the quality of life of the community.

Santa Fe's goal of finding international opportunities for artists led to an exchange in 2022 between artisans in Santa Fe and Trinidad, Cuba. Trinidad is a newer member of the Network, appointed in 2019. Both cities have the Crafts and Folk Art designation.

Sabrina Pratt, a consultant to the city of Santa Fe Arts and Culture Department, contacted Duznel Zaquera Amador, director of Trinidad's Office of Conservation and focal point for the Creative Cities Network. Discussions regarding potential exchanges led to the identification of artisans in both cities who have a shared passion for keeping historical traditions alive. The four women identified are quite accomplished in needlework, both in



making work for sale, and teaching and demonstrating how the work is done.

Julia R. Gomez and Barbara Romero Alba of Santa Fe are experts at Spanish Colonial colcha stitching dating from the seventeenth century. Julia mentored Barbara in learning about this style of embroidery. They and others keep the tradition alive by demonstrating and teaching at institutions such as El Rancho de las Golondrinas and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art in Santa Fe. Colcha embroidery is done with hand-dyed hand-spun wool from the Churro sheep of northern New Mexico. It started as a stitch to mend blankets and was also used to decorate items such as curtains, alter cloths and tablecloths.

Trinidad's participants in the project are Zobeida González and Obdulia González. They are sisters who learned their craft through family tradition and teaching themselves. They are experts at embroidery, crochet, and drawn thread techniques. Zobeida, Obdulia, and other members of the Urdimbre collective demonstrate, teach, and sell their crafts at the Museo Romantico on the main plaza of Trinidad. The building was completed in 1808 and it now houses a collection of nineteenth-century artifacts illustrating the life of Trinidad's wealthy class at that time. The museum's curator makes historic needlework from the collection available to the Urdimbre artisans for reference as they create modern-day versions. Urdimbre has eight members who have been working together and teaching





young people since 2017.

After some brainstorming on how an exchange could work without the artists traveling to each other's cities, it was decided to make four pieces with two artists working on each one. Using the traditional methods of their city, each artisan embroidered half of one 22-inch cloth square that was completed by an artist in the other city, bringing two traditions together. Sabrina Pratt made the exchange of the half completed works during an April 2022 visit to Trinidad.

An exhibit featuring two of the completed works is planned for summer 2023 in Santa Fe. "We are excited about this exchange and looking forward to sharing the results with the community. Culture joins us together and establishes relationships that foster conservation and stewardship of ideas and heritage," said Pauline Kanako Kamiyama, director of the City of Santa Fe Arts and Culture Department.

The City of Santa Fe Arts and Culture Department will install the exhibit at the Community Gallery in Santa Fe's convention center in June 2023. The centerpieces of the exhibit will be two of the finished works of art (the other two are in Trinidad) and video-taped interviews of the artisans.

Sabrina Pratt
(Focal Point of Santa Fe)