***A Century of Color: Maya Weaving and Textiles* [DVD]. Paul G. Vitale and Kathleen Mossman Vitale, producers. Vallejo, CA: Endangered Threads Documentaries, 2007. 53 min.**

Splendor in the Highlands: Maya Weavers of Guatemala* [DVD]. Paul G. Vitale and Kathleen Mossman Vitale, producers. Vallejo, CA: Endangered Threads Documentaries, 2005. 27 min.

Reviewed by Walter E. Little

Maya weavers and textiles have long been romantic subjects for scholars and collectors. Both *A Century of Color: Maya Weaving and Textiles* and *Splendor in the Highlands: Maya Weavers of Guatemala*, videos by Endangered Threads Documentaries, situate Maya textile production within two distinct forms of romanticism. In the former longer documentary, Maya textiles are presented as under threat and in danger of disappearing. In the latter shorter documentary, Margot Blum Schevill narrates, "Maya weaving and Maya weavers are alive and well today." These perspectives can be taken as positions to stimulate interest in and promote action to help keep Maya textile production vibrant.

Both documentaries share a number of characteristics. They explain continuities and changes in Guatemalan textiles along with some technical aspects of weaving or other techniques related to the production of textiles. They are filled with beautiful images of the Guatemalan highlands, Mayas dressed in splendid clothes, and footage of weavers practicing their craft. Each ends with a summary of the content that was presented. Despite the somewhat parallel structures and common themes, the two documentaries do not duplicate each other.

A Century of Color traces continuities and change in textiles. It uses the Gustavus A. Eisen 1902 collection as a starting place, but it also makes romantic connections to the Maya past. The Eisen collection is the most extensive early collection of Guatemalan textiles and features primarily clothing for daily wear. It is housed at the University of California at Berkeley's Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology.

The filmmakers take good care to situate contemporary Guatemala weavers within contexts of poverty and the history of violence against Mayas. In addition, they explain that these political and economic conditions and changes, including the resale of used factory-made clothing from the United States threaten both Maya weavers and their products. They also warn in various places in the documentary that cultural traditions that support weaving are disappearing and that this is contributing to the disappearance of Maya weaving in Guatemala. Such observations about the perils faced by Maya weaving are debatable, however, it is certain that Maya weaving is changing.

The film's strength is that it emphasizes that Maya textiles—their production and styles—have always changed. The filmmakers do a fine job of illustrating how and why Maya weavers have

developed new techniques for weaving and innovated new styles, while their products remain distinctly Maya. There are plenty of examples of weavers from dozens of communities using a variety of looms. Changes in materials are discussed, such as how loom sticks today are not always made of wood, but of plastic tubing. Technical aspects, such as the jaspe dying process, turning the loom, and finishing selvages verses cutting the textile from the loom are explained to demonstrate the skills of the weavers and differences in quality.

Differences in textile and clothing styles between communities are also noted. The filmmakers discuss clothing, item by item, observing that huipiles (blouses worn by Maya women), are "fine example of a weaver's skill." This contrasts with the sentiments of many Maya textile collectors by emphasizing that being in style is important. So often textiles are presented as static, rather than as fashion that follows trends. New fashions develop from innovative individuals, generational differences, and the greater flow of clothing among communities. The filmmakers note that there is a practice of exchanging styles and learning to weave the designs and styles of other communities. Such exchanges often lead to new styles that reflect a Pan-Maya fashion sense, rather than one based on one specific community.

With respect to men's clothing, the filmmakers note that religious changes are impacting men's clothing, especially in Chichicastenango, and that work and labor conditions have had a dramatic, negative impact on men's clothing. Only in a few towns, like Solola and Todos Santos, do men still wear their traditional clothing.

The filmmakers, using various communities as examples, explain how the traditional woman's outfit is disappearing item by item. This, however, is contrasted at the end of the film by a statement that Maya weaving continues, despite political, economic, and other changes that Mayas face today.

The shorter film, *Splendor in the Highlands*, begins with an explanation as to why Maya textile traditions persist today. It includes a discussion of the impacts of the international market and tourism on weavers and their textiles, as well as a mention of prices. School is presented as a distraction, implying that it is incompatible with weaving. This sets up a traditional-modern dichotomy that is present throughout the film. Curiously, while some elements of modernity may negatively impact weaving and the wearing of traditional clothing, tourism is presented as having a positive impact, allowing weavers to produce for visitors to Guatemala and for international clients.

It is ironic, however, that the filmmakers do not allow for Maya clothing styles to be compatible with most modern aspects of Guatemalan life. In fact, Mayas, both men and women, are wearing new styles that are distinctly Maya in wide, non-traditional social contexts, sometimes at the expense of being discriminated against by the politically and economically dominant, but numerically fewer, non-Maya population.

In this film, different technical aspects are featured than in *A Century of Color*. It shows how to warp a loom, for example, emphasizing the skill needed to weave. In addition, the amount of labor and time needed to weave a Patzun huipil—one of the most popular huilpil styles

throughout Guatemala—is illustrated. It is inferred that in the labor of weaving other activities are incorporated into the daily lives of weavers and that weaving itself is a communal activity.

Unfortunately, in either film, there is little said in the words of the weavers themselves. While much is made of how weavers sit and do the act of weaving, no comments by weavers about the impacts of social, political, and economic change are given. No weaver or vendor offers reasons about how used clothing from the United States or tourism, for example, hurt or help weavers. This distances the viewer from the weavers themselves, de-emphasizing the role that real people play in the production and consumption of Maya textiles.

The summary at the end of this film, as in the other, is a nice feature for classroom use, but both films are most appropriate for popular audiences and high school students unfamiliar with Guatemala and Maya textiles.

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