

# THE MAXWELL

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Making the Maya Exhibition  
(right, also see pg. 13)

Museum Director's Report  
(pg. 2)

MMA President's Report  
(pg. 4)

"Outside" Research at the  
Maxwell Museum (pg. 6)

Excavations at Conejito Shelter,  
N.W. New Mexico (pg. 11)

New Exhibit: "Weaving  
Generations Together:  
Evolving Creativity in the  
Maya of Chiapas" (pg. 13)

Public Programs, Events &  
Exhibits (pg. 14)

MMA Annual Meeting  
(pg. 17)

Navajo Rug Auction (pg. 19)

## Weaving Generations Together Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas



Textiles from the Patricia Greenfield Collection

### Making the Maya Exhibition

*[See page 13 for a description of this new exhibit.]*

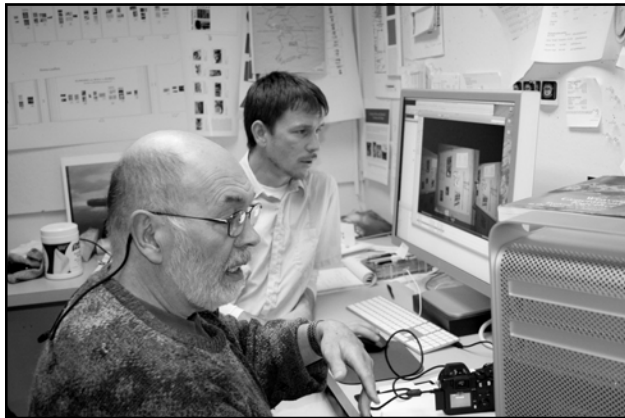
WHEN PATRICIA GREENFIELD PROPOSED DOING an exhibition at the Maxwell Museum that would represent her book *Weaving Generations Together*, I jumped at the chance!

Having worked in southern Mexico as a graduate student for many years, I knew that demonstrating the intrinsic value of her research in Chiapas as an exhibition could not only express the continuity of cultural identity through the display of beautiful and quite fanciful textiles from the Maya highland community of Zinacantán, while also addressing

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Ethnology Collections

## Making the Maya Exhibition



Exhibits Director, Ian Wagoner (left) and Student Graphics Assistant, Jeffery Aikens working on exhibition text panels and layout.



Kathryn Klein, Curator of Ethnology (left) and Amy Grochowski, Curator of Education writing text for Ixchel's Learning Tree of Life activities.

*(Continued from page 1)*

how important the process of learning and the transmission of knowledge is to the conservation of cultural heritage in a globally changing world.

And because the subject of her research involved a learning process, the exhibition would also have a universal appeal to children, parents, and all those who enjoy learning.

To create an exhibition from a book of another scholar's research entails deconstruction of the original work. Looking at a picture of a textile in a book is significantly different than seeing a textile up close on display.

Having on loan Patricia Greenfield's collection of textiles from Zinacantán was the first step. Making the selection of textiles that represented her research included, organizing and documentation of the entire collection as well as analysis of the design and construction of each

textile to find examples that would represent the cultural content of the exhibition.

Working with a UNM doctoral candidate and one of my graduate student curatorial assistants, Ruth Jolie, I spent many hours discovering the complexity of the textiles and began to really understand how they remained identifiable as from Zinacantán, even though, at first glance they may seem wildly different from each other.

Our chief goal was to give museum visitors and particularly those really interested in textiles the opportunity to better understand Patricia Greenfield's research by writing detailed technical descriptions of the textiles on display.

Another goal was to work with the Maxwell's Curator of Education, Amy Grochowski, to build family activities into the exhibition itself.

Thus, *Ixchel's Learning Tree of Life* was born. Ixchel, the ancient

Maya goddess of weaving, guides the visitor through the steps of understanding the types of traditional garments worn today in Zinacantán; how children learn to weave on backstrap looms; the construction of textiles and how they are worn; and how innovative designs are woven or embroidered into each garment.

If a viewer were to read nothing else but the Ixchel panels they could walk away with a good understanding of the complexity of these garments.

Along with the self-guided learning activities within the exhibition, the Maxwell will continue its Maya journey through public events such as the Ortiz Center's Passport to People Family program, featuring Maya visitors from Mexico, weaving demonstrations, family hands-on activities, and the exploration of the ancient Maya cosmos.

The design and fabrication of the exhibition itself is not only

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Ethnology Collections

## Making the Maya Exhibition



Graduate Student Curatorial Assistants, Ruth Burgette Jolie (left) and Sarah Matthews working on the organization of textile documentation.



J. Michael Rendina, Exhibits Preparator (left) and Michael Hill, Student Exhibits Assistant cut wood on the table saw to make cases for the exhibition.

*(Continued from page 2)*

inextricable from research content, but also from the three-dimensionality of its parts.

Our Director of Exhibitions, Ian Wagoner made *Weaving Generations Together* a visually stunning exhibition. It takes hours upon hours of hard work and great attention to every detail to make an exhibition look seamless.

Creating the graphics, choosing color schemes, laying out the cases, panels, labels, and photographs, and keeping track of every single re-edit of the text is amazingly complex.

Case work, all of the mounts for the textiles and installation of exhibition and lighting by our Exhibits Preparator, Michael Rendina, are polished and refined with careful consideration of the care and conservation of every object in the exhibition.

And because the exhibition is made to travel, every part of the

exhibition is organized, fit together, and made of sturdy materials that will last over time from use, but will also come down and pack in a reasonable and compact way.

Finally, because we have a small staff at the Maxwell Museum I want to acknowledge all of the student employees and volunteers who worked on the exhibition: in the Ethnology Collections: Ruth Jolie, Gwendolyn Saul, Sara Mathews, and Laurel Babcock, as well as in the Exhibits Department: Jeff Aiken, Michael Hill, Graysin Vogel, James Almand, and Mike Paré. Without them, the exhibition would not have been possible.

I truly believe that the process of learning how to make an exhibition also teaches one how to manage large projects as well as communicate with people. It is an invaluable life lesson to experience how a group of people must work as a team and how the ac-

tion of one affects another.

I hope all of these students and volunteers will feel very proud of themselves for their patience, humor, and professionalism that they have demonstrated here.

It's a great joy to see the realization of the exhibition *Weaving Generations Together*, come together and made by all!

Kathryn Klein

*The Maxwell Museum's ethnology collections developed through systematic anthropological research, collecting, and exhibitions. Together with accompanying documentation, and photographic records in the museum's photo archives, the ethnology collections provide a substantial basis for the study of the symbolic, technological and aesthetic aspects of human culture.*

*To learn more about the ethnology collections contact Kathryn Klein at <KKlein@unm.edu >.*

# Public Programs, Events, & Exhibits

## Educational and Entertaining Activities for the Entire Family

### New Exhibit: Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas

IN 1969 AND 1970, Harvard researcher Patricia Marks Greenfield and Carla Childs, an anthropology student with the Harvard Chiapas Project, spent two summers doing fieldwork in Nabenchauk, a hamlet of the highland Maya community of Zinacantec in Chiapas, Mexico.

They were there to study how Zinacantec girls learn weaving in apprenticeship with their mothers and how weaving affects the way the girls think.

Greenfield went to the field with her two young children, Lauren and Matthew.

Twenty one years later, in 1991, Greenfield and Childs went back to Chiapas to learn how weaving could answer their questions about the psychological effects of social and economic change.

Under contract with *National Geographic*, Lauren Greenfield accompanied them to photograph life in the highlands of Chiapas.

In interpretive remarks for

the exhibit, Greenfield explains: “we were there to study how the development of entrepreneurship in the intervening two decades had affected weaving, not only the weaving itself, but also the way the weaving was taught and learned and the nature of



weaving as a representational enterprise. In 1991, we wanted to study the daughters of our prior weaving learners, to see how they were learning to weave in the new, more commercial and entrepreneurial environment.”

The fieldwork resulted in a long-range study of two generations of Zinacantecs. *Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas*, an exhibit currently at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is based on the award winning book that explores how textile traditions have changed in one Maya community in highland Chiapas.

Visitors are invited to learn about the role of Zinacantec mothers teaching children cultural traditions; the transformation from community creativity to individual creativity; the techniques of backstrap loom weaving; how girls learn to weave and create textile patterns, and the use of textiles in everyday Maya life.

[This article is largely extracted from *Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas*, by Patricia Marks Greenfield. Additional information about the book and exhibit can be found online at

<http://weaving-generations.psych.ucla.edu>

<http://weaving-generations.psych.ucla.edu>

Patricia Greenfield  
Kathryn Klein  
Mary Beth Hermans,

## Public Programs, Events, & Exhibits (cont'd)

### NEW EXHIBIT — WEAVING GENERATIONS TOGETHER EVOLVING CREATIVITY IN THE MAYA OF CHIAPAS THROUGH 2011

San Lorenzo Zinacantán is a municipality in the southern part of the Central Chiapas highlands in the Mexican state of Chiapas.

About 98% of its population are Tzotzil Maya, an indigenous people with linguistic and cultural ties to other highland Maya peoples.

In Nabenchauk, Chiapas, a hamlet of Zinacantán, girls and women like their counterparts across the region, carry



on the centuries-long tradition of weaving on backstrap looms.

This exhibit includes photographs of Maya weavers taken by Lauren Greenfield; shows examples of Zinacantán textile weaving techniques; demonstrates backstrap loom weaving; illustrates how girls learn to create and weave textile patterns; and shows the use of textiles in everyday Maya life.