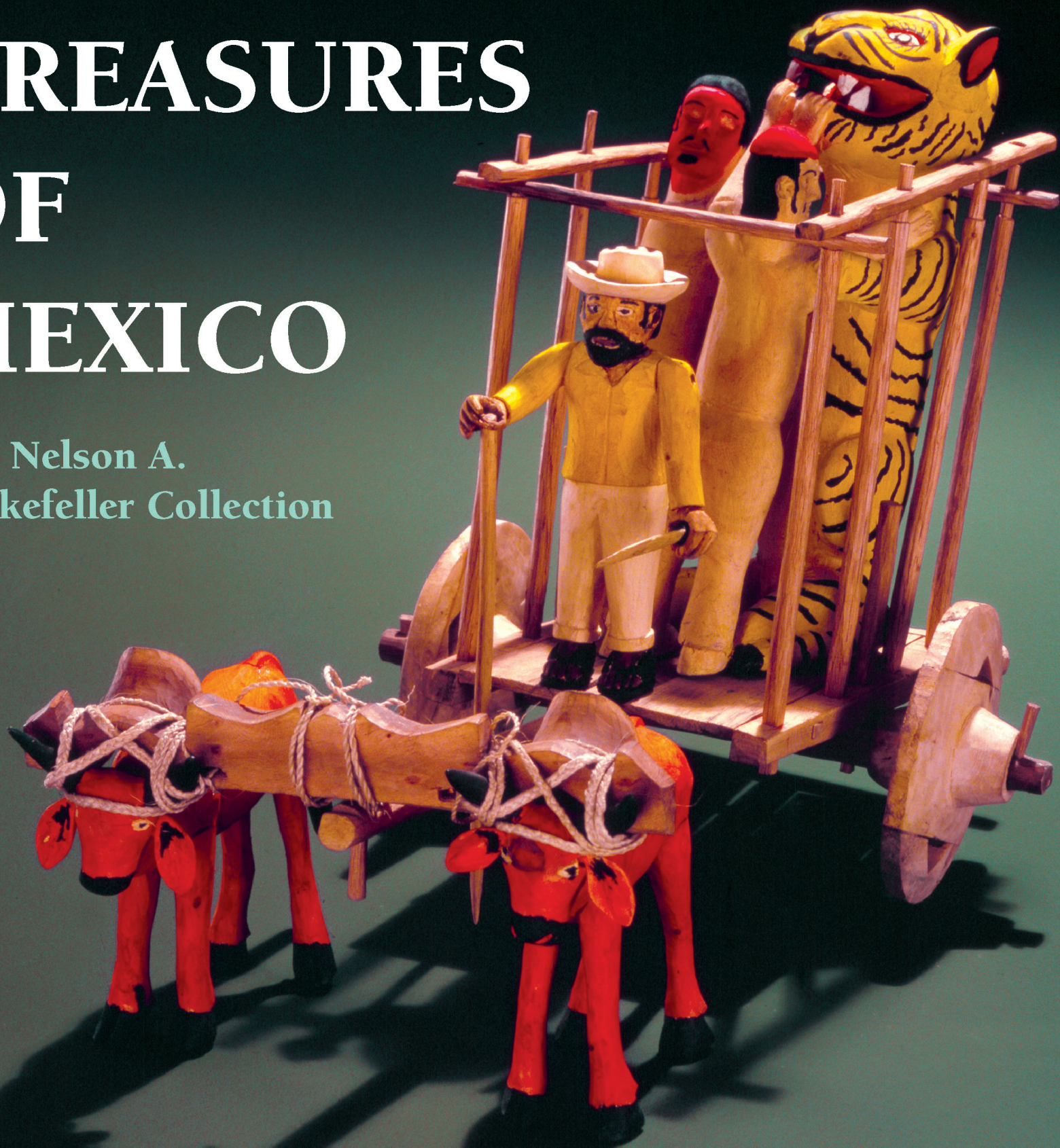


FOLK TREASURES OF MEXICO

The Nelson A.
Rockefeller Collection



Text by Marion Oettinger, Jr.
Photographs by Lee Boltin

FOLK TREASURES OF MEXICO



FOLK TREASURES



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection
in the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Mexican Museum, San Francisco

OF MEXICO

Text by Marion Oettinger, Jr.

With foreword by Ann Rockefeller Roberts and
photographs by Lee Boltin

Additional photographs by John Dyer and
captions and photographs by Annie O'Neill



Arte Público Press
Houston, Texas

Folk art has in it the pulse beat of the human hand.

—Pál Kelemen, *Vanishing Art of the Americas*, 1977

Editor: Gabriela Baeza Ventura

Designer: Dana Sloan

Folk Treasures of Mexico: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection is made possible through grants from Ann Rockefeller Roberts and the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.

Recovering the past, creating the future

On page i:

Negrito Mask. Michoacán. San Antonio Museum of Art (detail of Plate 59)

On pages ii–iii:

Teodora Blanco. **Animal Band.** Oaxaca. Mexican Museum, San Francisco, and San Antonio Museum of Art (Plate 86)

Note of the plate captions:

The abbreviations MM and SAMA stand for the Mexican Museum, San Francisco, and the San Antonio Museum of Art, respectively.

Arte Público Press
University of Houston
452 Cullen Performance Hall
Houston, Texas 77204-2004

Cover design by Dana Sloan

Oettinger, Jr., Marion.

Folk Treasures of Mexico: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection
/ by Marion Oettinger, Jr.; photographs by Lee Boltin.

p. cm.

Originally published: New York: Abrams, 1990.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-55885-595-3 (alk. paper)

1. Folk art—Mexico. 2. Rockefeller, Nelson A. (Nelson Aldrich), 1908-1979—Art collections. 3. Folk art—Private collections—New York (State)—New York. I. Boltin, Lee. II. San Antonio Museum of Art. III. Mexican Museum. IV. Title.

NK844.O35 2010

745.0972'07473—dc22

2009053983

CIP

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

© 2010 by Ann Rockefeller Roberts

Printed in China

February 2010–May 2010

Creative Printing USA Inc.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Foreword by Ann Rockefeller Roberts	vii
Prologue by Marion Oettinger, Jr.	ix
Acknowledgments	xvii
Foreword by Nelson A. Rockefeller	xxiii
Preface by Ann Rockefeller Roberts	xxxix
Introduction by Avon Neal	xxxv
Rockefeller the Collector	1
<i>Mexico: A Nation Discovers Itself</i>	11
<i>Voyage to Mexico</i>	16
<i>A Philosophy of Collecting</i>	29
The Collection	35
<i>History and Importance of the Collection</i>	35
<i>The Nature of the Collection</i>	40
<i>Utilitarian Objects</i>	40
<i>Ceremonial Objects</i>	74
<i>Objects of Play and Fantasy</i>	88
<i>Decorative Objects</i>	131
The Mexican Folk Artist	161
Notes	169
Chronology	173
Glossary	175
Bibliography	179
Index	183
Photograph Credits	190

Foreword by Ann Rockefeller Roberts

 It brings great joy and satisfaction to introduce the second edition of *Folk Treasures of Mexico. The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection*. What is most exciting is that this wonderful book will once again be available to scholars and lovers of Mexican folk art. Equally important is Father's original dream of having the book published in Spanish and English so that the people whose genius and loving celebration of life who brought forth this infinitely varied and engaging art will have access to it in their own language.

Marion Oettinger, Jr., the author of the original text, has once again graciously consented to put pen to paper and written a fine Prologue that eloquently describes what has happened to the Mexican Folk Art collections at SAMA (San Antonio Museum of Art) during the intervening nineteen years. The readers thus are brought into the present and told of the remarkable accomplishments that have taken place in this time. It is a great story that tells of the dedication, creativity and untiring efforts of the staff; of the wonderful generosity of loyal board members, donors and volunteers who continue to give of their time, skills and funds; and of how inspiring the collections are. All of this has brought forth the magic that wants to be known, shared and enjoyed. It infuses the air in the galleries with the color, motion, humor and pathos of life itself. The objects are accessible to young and old alike and all those in between. They remind us of our own stories, our personal celebrations, our foibles. We leave the galleries feeling lighter, smiling, perhaps even with the desire to make a celebration of our own.

It has taken some time to bring forth this new edition, and every step of the way has been guided by those who believed in the project and were ready and willing to assist. As a result, the process has been an important collaboration among many people.

To begin, Henry A. J. Ramos, Executive Editor of the Hispanic Civil Rights Series at Arte Público Press, worked closely with me to create a plan that detailed what was required for republication, and gave his confidence and support throughout. He introduced me to Nicolás Kanellos, Director of Arte Público Press at the University of Houston, and things began to move.

Nicolás agreed to take on this complex project of republishing a second edition and a Spanish edition concurrently. Since then he and Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Executive Editor at APP, have personally overseen and directed every aspect of the process with great skill and personal commitment in a remarkably short time. Nicolás also brought Artes de México Press to publish the Spanish edition. As he noted, they not only accepted the project but put it as a priority in their publishing schedule creating an entirely new book for Spanish-language readers. Their enthusiasm, dedication and expert translation has resulted in a timely completion of this book for Spanish-speakers.

Annie O'Neill, who was an important contributor to the first edition as folklorist, photographer and caption writer, rejoined us. This time, she single-handedly took on the important project of sorting, untangling and properly inventoring all the photographs, recovering several that were thought to be lost. Her work saved untold time and expense.

On the legal and strategic side, Fred Koenigsberg, lawyer par excellence, saw to it that all the legal I's were dotted and T's were crossed with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of fine oversight and attention to what was of the essence. Richardson Love, Jr., assisted with background history and strategy in untangling us from the original publisher.

In addition, thanks and appreciation to all those who have worked diligently behind the scenes to bring this project to fruition.

It is my hope that all who read this book will also experience some of the magic of *Las artes populares* and feel the call to go see them in the market place, as Father did, experiencing the fun of collecting a few art pieces themselves, or to come to SAMA and wander in the galleries, or find where these arts are being exhibited in their own communities, or be inspired to learn more about Mexico and its rich history, culture and the life of its *artesanos*.

Prologue by Marion Oettinger, Jr.

The publication of this second edition of *Folk Treasures of Mexico: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection* is an important step toward further realization of Rockefeller's dream to highlight and celebrate the wonderful folk art of Mexico. He was enamored with Latin America, especially Mexico, where he first traveled in 1933, and art became a special way he could continue to partake in the warmth, color, exuberance and spirit of that part of the world long after his return to New York or Washington. Indeed, one of Rockefeller's last foreign visits before his death in 1979 was a whirlwind trip to Mexico with daughter, Ann, folk art specialist Annie O'Neill and others to once again explore the magic of Oaxaca during October of 1978. He was completely re-energized, and with characteristic zeal, jumped right into crowded public markets and sat down with extraordinarily talented folk artists, who at the time, had not an inkling of how profoundly their own lives and professions would be impacted by his visit and the selection of their art for his collection. To this day, snapshots of his visit still adorn the adobe walls of many of the artists in the Valley of Oaxaca. News of Rockefeller's visit quickly spread, not only throughout Mexico, but also among folk art aficionados and museums in the United States and beyond. I clearly remember my own first visit, late in 1978, to the home of the legendary Oaxaca ceramist Teodora Blanco. After I had marveled at her work and made a few small purchases, she mentioned that one of my countrymen had recently visited her, and, perhaps, I knew him. She disappeared into the backroom and emerged moments later with a glossy 8 x 10 black and white print of herself with Rockefeller holding one of her exotic figures. The photo was warmly inscribed to Doña Teodora. I explained that I only knew of Nelson Rockefeller.

Rockefeller's devotion to Latin America and his keen eye for very good art had made him a leader in the field and many looked to him for guidance and legitimacy. Over many decades, he and his illustrious family had left enduring

marks on the cultural life of the United States, especially in major art museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Abby Aldridge Rockefeller American Folk Art Museum and other leading institutions. For Nelson Rockefeller to leave his imprimatur on a particular genre of art or the work of an individual artist, folk or fine, was not to be taken lightly—and, it never was. Rockefeller's commitment to Mexican folk art, thirty years after his death, continues to influence and shape many fields of artistic expression.

Ann Rockefeller Robert's gift of 2,500 pieces of Mexican folk art to the San Antonio Museum of Art in 1985 profoundly affected the Museum and strongly helped shape its commitment to Mexican folk art, as well as Latin American art, in general. It has attracted additional donations of art, led to increased endowment funds and provided impetus for hundreds of exhibitions, loans to other institutions, publications, internships and research projects over the past twenty-four years. Finally, this gift became a major catalyst leading to the completion, in 1998, of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art, generally considered to be the most comprehensive statement on the subject in this country.

The San Antonio Museum of Art (SAMA) is proud of its stewardship of the Rockefeller collection over more than two decades and pleased that it has grown the collection, staffed the Latin American Department with thoroughly professional personnel, published important segments of the collection and provided rich opportunities for students and fully developed scholars to work with Rockefeller materials in our possession.

ADDITIONAL ACQUISITIONS

From the very beginning, the gift of Nelson Rockefeller's collection has been a magnet for other important collections. Early on, trustees of the Robert K. Winn Collection of Mexican Folk Art agreed to donate approximately 3,000 pieces of folk and colonial art to SAMA once the Rockefeller gift had been secured. Rather than duplicate the Rockefeller collection, Winn's art greatly complemented it in content, age and materials. Furthermore, the Winn collection brought with it endowment funds to hire a full-time curator to shepherd the folk art collection through to exhibition

and publication, and beyond. This endowment, in turn, has attracted additional funds through annual volunteer-run events such as Bazar Sábado, which has added over \$200,000 to the endowment and paid for dozens of special lectures, small exhibitions and acquisitions.

In 1992, SAMA was given a major collection of Guatemalan indigenous textiles by Harwood and Kate Smith of Dallas that represents male and female costumes from approximately 30 villages in the highlands. Over the years, the Museum has received gifts from people around the United States who had known Rockefeller and wanted to honor their special friendship. In the late 1990s, Laurence Rockefeller, Nelson's older brother, gave the Museum important Mexican modern paintings by Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot, and others to show his appreciation for the professional manner in which SAMA had cared for his late brother's collection. Finally, knowing SAMA's serious commitment to the preservation, study, and sharing of Latin American folk art, Peter P. Cecere, an extraordinarily creative collector of nineteenth and twentieth century folk art from Spain and various parts of Latin America, gave the Museum more than 300 important works that led to a serious examination of the Spanish roots of Latin American folk art.

EXHIBITIONS AND LOANS TO OTHER MUSEUMS

Over the past twenty years, SAMA has made a strong and concerted effort to exhibit as much of the Rockefeller collection as possible. In the fall of 1986, the Museum mounted a major long-term exhibition entitled *Con Cariño: Mexican Folk Art from the Collection of the San Antonio Museum of Art*. About half of the 300 pieces on display were from the Rockefeller collection. The Museum drew extensively from the collection over the next two decades to install temporary exhibitions on Days of the Dead, votive art, folk saints, games, the Virgin of Guadalupe, Holy Week and many other subjects.

To celebrate the publication of the first edition of *Folk Treasures* in 1990, SAMA organized a special traveling exhibition of masterpieces from the Rockefeller collection that was seen in ten cities around the United States, including Los Angeles, Miami, Sacramento, Colorado Springs and other major centers of Latino population. When the tour ended two years later, several hundred thousand people had seen it—exactly what we had hoped for.

In the early 1990s, we placed 500 pieces of Latin American folk art, much of it Rockefeller material, into a national registry known as the Museum Loan Network to facilitate long-term loans to museums that have little or no art of a particular type. This program, funded by the Pew/Knight Foundations and administered by MIT, became the vehicle for a major loan of several hundred folk art pieces to the Tallahassee Museum of Art for most of a year. SAMA still participates in this creative program and looks forward to future requests.

The changing demographics of the United States over the past two decades have meant that growing Latino populations are now present in most parts of the country. Museums in many of these communities have no collections linking them to their new citizens, and SAMA has freely lent materials to these institutions. Most recently, the Public Museum in Reading, Pennsylvania, an eighteenth-century community founded by Anglo-Saxons, but now comprised of a population that is over 50 percent Latino, requested approximately 100 pieces from the Rockefeller/Winn collections, and we gladly obliged. We have lent Rockefeller materials to temporary exhibitions at Yale University, the Craft and Folk Art Museum of Los Angeles County, the museum at Florida International University, the Corcoran Museum in Washington, D.C., the Seattle Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Field Museum in Chicago, as well as other institutions, and we look forward to doing so in the future.

THE NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN ART AND THE FUTURE

In 1991, the San Antonio Museum of Art hosted what was perhaps the greatest, most comprehensive, exhibition on Mexican art ever presented in this country: *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*. Organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Mexican government, this groundbreaking exhibition drew more than 270,000 visitors to SAMA. The tremendous success of this exhibition and the strong Mexican heritage of the majority of San Antonio's population, spoke strongly in favor of the Museum increasing its commitment to the art of Latin America. Within a year after the close of *Splendors* the Museum set out to design and build a new wing to house and exhibit the art of Mexico and other parts of Latin America.



Exterior Windows looking into the pre-Columbian gallery of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center (NAR) for Latin American Art.



Spanish Colonial gallery of the NAR Center for Latin American Art.



Modern/Contemporary gallery of the NAR Center for Latin American Art.



Folk Art gallery of the NAR Center for Latin American Art.

Financial support came from local and national foundations, corporations, families, the National Endowment for the Humanities, a city of San Antonio bond initiative and individuals who agreed with the Museum's mission to honor and celebrate the rich artistic heritage of Mexico, Central and South America. In recognition of his early devotion to the arts of Latin America and his love of the people of that area of the world, the Museum requested permission to name the new 30,000 square-foot center in honor of Nelson A. Rockefeller.

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin America, that opened to the public in the fall of 1998, has four permanent galleries devoted to pre-Columbian, Spanish Colonial/Republican, Modern/Contemporary and Folk Art, as well as a small space designed for temporary exhibitions drawn mainly from the permanent collection.

At present, the third floor of the Rockefeller Center is used for storage and processing of new acquisitions. Our plans are to convert this space into a center for the study of Latin American art. It will hold our Latin American art research library and have special space for the Museum's important photographic material. In addition, the new facility will provide open storage for the majority of the Museum's smaller works in a physical environment conducive to scholarly research. We plan to have seminar rooms and research carrels for visiting scholars from around the United States and beyond. It is the Museum's hope that sufficient funds will be raised to establish endowments to operate this exciting research center and pay for the stipends of its researchers.

Finally, we are proud of the professional stewardship of the Rockefeller collection by the San Antonio Museum of Art and pleased with the ways we have leveraged this important collection so that it has grown and been shared with citizens of the United States and beyond. The new English and Spanish editions of *Folk Treasures of Mexico: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection* moves Rockefeller's dream quite a bit further along.

Marion Oettinger, Jr.
Curator of Latin American Art and
The Betty and Bob Kelso Director of the San Antonio Museum of Art
August 2009

