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Stitch-by-Stitch

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Abstract

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Stitch-by-Stitch

by Katacha Díaz

Many years ago while on vacation in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I decided to take an early morning stroll in the city's art district. As I walked along Canyon Road, an open gate was an invitation to enter the courtyard of an old adobe house-turned-art-studio and gallery. I was charmed by the bronze lizards crawling up the walls and the whimsical dancing sheep sculpture by the old Spanish fountain in the garden. And what a delight to see painted lady butterflies swarming and feasting on the lush lavender bush, and the broad-tailed hummers as they performed acrobatic maneuvers and hovered motionless in the air!

As I continued to watch the hummingbirds sipping nectar from Indian paintbrush and cholla cactus flowers, I heard mariachi music coming from the direction of the city's historic plaza, so I decided to locate the source.

Much to my surprise and delight, the annual Spanish Market was being held that weekend. I was overjoyed to see the extensive collection of Spanish colonial arts and crafts on exhibit, including straw appliqué, metal work, carvings and paintings of religious figures, weaving, and embroidery. It brought back fond memories of my childhood in Peru, where I'd seen similar pieces in the homes of my relatives. But it was the young 5 to 17-year-old artists who caught my attention and captured my heart.

When I walked by the youth artist exhibit area and saw the colorful traditional colonial Spanish *colcha* embroidery pieces on display at a young artist's table, I was transported

back in time to summer embroidery lessons with Tía Mechita in Miraflores. I loved working side-by-side with my great-aunt on my embroidery and listening to her stories about our colonial Spanish ancestors and the women who brought sewing and embroidery traditions to Peru. Sitting up in the balcony reminiscent of the old Moorish-inspired *miradors* of Lima's colonial period, my great-aunt lovingly taught me the art of hand embroidery stitch-by-stitch. With a twinkle in her eye, Tía Mechita reminded me that embroidery was also what proper *señoritas* do!

I met and interviewed *colcha* artist Kate Murphy de Sosaya. She exhibits and sells her beautiful embroidery pieces every summer. The young artist showed talent and confidence, as well as a great deal of knowledge and passion about her art form. Kate was mentored by her maternal grandmother, Mónica Sosaya Halford, who is a master of *colcha* and a descendant of some of Santa Fe's earliest Spanish settlers. Kate proudly shared that some of her grandmother's ancestors had arrived with Don Juan de Oñate in 1598. The Spanish women brought sewing traditions and introduced the art of mending holes in bedspreads, or *colchas*, as well as embroidering colorful designs on the *sabanilla*, a plain utilitarian woolen textile used in New Mexico.

Some of the designs on Kate's embroidery pieces—birds, flowers, leaves, and animals—are traditional ones dating back to New Mexico Spanish colonial period. Stitch-by-stitch, Kate embroiders beautiful designs like her Spanish ancestors did many, many years ago. Keeping family traditions alive is a lot of fun! Kate earns money and prizes with her *colcha* embroidery.

The annual arts and crafts market is sponsored by the Spanish Colonial Arts Society in Santa Fe, and it attracts visitors and



serious collectors from all over the world. The market gives Kate and other young Hispanic artists the chance to exhibit their versions of Spanish colonial arts and crafts, share knowledge, and practice business skills.

Life is full of serendipitous happenings. Although the years have passed by quickly, I have fond memories of that early morning summer stroll in Santa Fe's art district. But it was the treasures celebrating centuries-old Spanish arts by modern young Hispanic artists that made that day so memorable and one of my most cherished memories.

