

FOLK ART OF THE 19TH CENTURY SOUTHWEST: THE IMPACT OF TRADE ON
TRADITION

By

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Folk Art of the 19th Century Southwest: the Impact of Trade on Tradition

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, for believing in me.

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I would like to thank my parents, first and foremost, for listening extremely patiently to every research topic I've ever explained to them. Also, my siblings for teaching me reading fast is the only way you won't get a book stolen from you or the cereal box moved. My friends for listening to me patiently talk extensively about sheep and looms and geography. Vanessa Schulman opened the door to my interest in the borderlands and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with the book *Who Would Have Thought It?* Lindsay Naylor taught me that geography truly intersects with everything. Michele Greet taught me to question what the word "American" means and how to disassemble the idea that Latin American art is a monolith. Lisa Bauman provided me with candy and professional advice. Thanks goes out to every Spanish teacher I've ever had: I wouldn't be here without the doors you unlocked for me. To Clare for supporting my writing since way back when I didn't know how to use a comma. To Kiersten, for always backing up my opinions. To Caitlin, for being an excellent listener. To Escape Room Arlington and the document center, for the laughter. This thesis would not exist without people to support me and my ideas.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Museum of International Folk Art	MOIFA
Spanish Colonial Arts Society	SCAS
United States of America	US

ABSTRACT

FOLK ART OF THE 19TH CENTURY SOUTHWEST: THE IMPACT OF TRADE ON TRADITION

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George Mason University, 2023

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This thesis focuses on folk art of the southwestern United States, made in what is now New Mexico in the 19th century. The US annexation of Mexico changed many aspects of territorial life, including access to new materials, changes in land ownership, new citizenship status, and a new language and culture entering the state. Through the case studies of two different types of folk art, *colcha* textiles and tin religious niches, this thesis argues for the environmental and economic impact that US incursion had on traditional folk-art practices. Through collection and accessioning at the Museum of International Folk Art in the 20th century, the museum defined and ascribed meanings to the folk-art objects that changed over time as the museum definition of folk art itself changed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

After the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, Mexico ceded large parts of its territory to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹ When the treaty was signed, the US border moved, absorbing Mexican and Indigenous people into the established US American racial and social hierarchy and alienating them from their Mexican heritage.² Art produced in the 19th-century Southwest and more specifically in New Mexico derived from Mexican craft traditions and indigenous art making.³ Art made by non-white, non-English speaking citizens was ignored or marginalized by museums and taste makers in the United States during the 19th century. This thesis examines two types of 19th-century New Mexican folk art objects, and their history and context in terms of local and national trade and intercultural encounters. This thesis also considers the collection of folk art by the Museum of International Folk Art in the 20th century. The museum's intervention imposed a definition of folk art upon these objects, and that definition changed over time as the museum and its curators' understanding of folk art evolved.

The Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, founded in 1953, specializes in global folk art with a robust collection of Hispanic folk art. Through

¹ John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest*. 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 1.

² Chávez, *The Lost Land*, 25.

³ For this thesis, I will use the word "Southwest" to refer to what is now the American Southwest and the border currently recognized by the United States and Mexican governments.

two types of case studies, this thesis will discuss how the MOIFA collection's framing of folk art changed over time. The case studies from the MOIFA collection are household objects from Mexican communities in the Southwest: *colcha* blankets and tinwork *nichos*.⁴ From 1953 to the 1990s, the museum's definition and characterization of folk art changed significantly.⁵ Interpretation by curators of *colcha* and *nichos* in exhibitions and texts reveals differing definitions over time. This thesis uses past exhibitions to explore curator's interpretations of these objects in the 20th century. Initially curators saw folk art as a static and traditional, but their definition evolved to a more nuanced understanding of folk art as a dynamic category that could absorb new forms and styles within its own culture. In Art History, folk art expanded beyond just a display category, crossing over into disciplines like anthropology, cultural studies, material culture studies, and geography.

The objects in the case studies, which were locally made in New Mexico, connect to national commercial culture that developed in the United States in the 19th century. They demonstrate how regional art serves as an artifact of a larger cultural process, in this case a small-scale economic dialogue with American globalization. The new US Mexico border created an artistic cultural shift in the annexed territory, as Mexican culture melded with culture in the United States. MOIFA's texts draw connecting lines between American and more specifically New Mexican trade in the 19th century, but never

⁴ religious niches often containing a *retablo* or portrait of a saint

⁵ The museum's current definition of folk art is available on their website. It is wide ranging and inclusive, and is discussed in the conclusion.

examine how this trade deeply impacted the form and content of folk-art objects. These objects demonstrate that tradition can be dynamic and folk art can absorb cultural change and adapt. In their original context, *nichos* and *colcha* were household goods, used daily by Hispanic people in the New Mexico territory. MOIFA began collecting Hispanic folk art objects in the 20th century, including *nichos* and *colcha* textiles, effectively stopping their quotidian use and placing them on display. Since 1953, the museum published academic research on Hispanic folk art objects. The aim of this thesis is to synthesize the museum's prior research on these objects with new research on how the museum shaped their interpretation. The goal is to enrich the context of *nichos* and *colcha* and argue that folk art is both dynamic and traditional. MOIFA currently promotes a very inclusive definition of folk art, but it took many years for their definition to evolve from narrow to broad.

Historical Overview

Westward expansion, the great American dream, to march across the North American continent and encouraged Anglo⁶ settlers to claim everything in sight. The expansion of the United States during the 19th-century brought new geographic areas and peoples under the jurisdiction of the US government.⁷ White settlers frequently led the push westward, displacing previous residents including Indigenous people. In this imperialistic quest, the US government encountered resistance in the lands governed by

⁶ A white, English-speaking American, sometimes with European roots. This thesis will use the term "Anglo" in its U.S. southwestern context to denote people who are not Hispanic.

⁷ The land of what is now the North American continent has been subject to several colonial regimes. I will use current geographic names for clarity and will explain if I use older geographic identifiers and how that place was different then what is known today as the state borders and international border with Mexico.

Mexico. In 1821, Mexico became independent from Spain, leaving Mexico to govern its vast territories. Their jurisdiction included modern day Texas (then the territory of Coahuila and Texas). Texas declared independence in 1836, but Mexico never recognized Texan claims to independence nor territory.⁸ The US annexed the Republic of Texas in 1845, meaning the US and Mexico had to agree on a new boundary while Mexico still recognized the land as legally belonging to them.⁹ Diplomacy failed to establish a border, and US President James Polk turned to military force to secure Texas, leading to skirmishes and eventually war.¹⁰ The US fought the Mexican American War (1846-1848) to acquire new territory and settle the border with Mexico at the Rio Grande River. The US won, and in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, annexed the land that now forms the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and California.¹¹ With one pen stroke, the US border moved south and west, incorporating thousands of Spanish speaking Mexican citizens into US lands.¹²

The terms of the treaty (1848) accounted for the absorption of 100,000 Mexican citizens into annexed US lands. In an initial draft of the treaty that was not ratified, Mexican general and president Antonio López de Santa Anna refused to consider the annexation of New Mexico (which under the Mexican government, included what is now

⁸ Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict*. 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 8.

⁹ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict*, 9-13.

¹⁰ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict*, 14.

¹¹ John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest*. 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 1.

¹² Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 24.

Arizona) with the argument that the Spanish speaking population of the region had no desire to be part of the United States.¹³ Santa Anna did not stay president long enough to see this demand stick, but the US softened the deal for Mexico by including articles that would retain the civil and property rights of former Mexican citizens, who would also have the choice to become US citizens.¹⁴ Mexican citizens had one year to submit their preference to keep their Mexican citizenship, and if not by default they elected to become US citizens and Congress would grant citizenship in the future.¹⁵ However, New Mexico became a territory under the treaty, rather than a state, meaning its people were not US citizens. The inhabitants of New Mexico did not receive all the rights and benefits of US citizenship until statehood in 1912, meaning they lived under the treaty with less protection and fewer civil rights than people living on land that became states.

Citizenship was not the only issue that arose from the implementation of the treaty. US negotiators promised to recognize land grants given by the Mexican government to citizens in their territories. The promise of protection for private property did not come to fruition, due to bureaucratic error and land-grabbing by Anglo-Americans.¹⁶ The vast majority of land grants in the ceded territory were “imperfect,” meaning the claimant had not yet fulfilled Mexican stipulations for legally owning the land.¹⁷ Even “perfect” claims in which someone legally owned land under the Mexican

¹³ Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict*. 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 34.

¹⁴ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: a Legacy of Conflict*, 46-47.

¹⁵ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 62.

¹⁶ “Anglo” is a term for any white American in the southwestern territories, denoting someone not of Mexican/Latino or Indigenous origin.

¹⁷ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 73.

government transferred to the jurisdiction of US courts, as it was now considered US land. Long legal battles and growing expenses created an opening for opportunistic Anglo lawyers who used the legal battles to acquire huge swathes of land.¹⁸ Lastly, the judicial system passed a series of judgments that provided for a small window of time for claimants to present their grant before their land would be considered abandoned.¹⁹ The promises to respect Mexican property rights quickly crumbled as US interest in land took precedence over the legal claims of people who were not full US citizens.

The US government quickly incorporated most, but not all, of the Southwest into the union. California gained statehood in 1850, followed by Nevada in 1864, Colorado in 1876, and Utah in 1896.²⁰ The areas that are now New Mexico and Arizona waited for admission until 1912, making Arizona the last contiguous state to be added to the United States in February of that year.²¹ The territories stood by for sixty-four-years as states borderlines hemmed them in. The people were not protected by the full rights and liberties guaranteed in the Constitution because they were not part of an incorporated state. The inhabitants of the Southwest were predominantly Catholic and Spanish-speaking while the US majority was white and Protestant. The offer of citizenship in 1848 was a privilege extended only to whites, but mestizo heritage linked Southwestern

¹⁸ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 78. This illegal activity was so widespread it was named the Santa Fe Ring, who claimed more than one million acres of previously Mexican owned land in New Mexico.

¹⁹ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 82. Land claims were overseen by the New Mexico Court of Private Land Claims, created by a law signed by the US president.

²⁰ “List of U.S. States by Date of Admission to the Union,” Wikipedia, accessed March 21, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_U.S._states_by_date_of_admission_to_the_Union&oldid=1078493688.

²¹ Wikipedia, “List of U.S. States by Date of Admission to the Union.”

people to Indigenous people.²² These conflicting categorizations made inhabitants of the territories legally white but socially and culturally “other”.²³ Mexican culture dominated the territories, creating a cultural disconnect with the white US majority and deeply rooted racist structures, likely part of the delay in granting statehood. The US-Mexico border continues to be a contentious place for culture, language, and history while geopolitical powers struggle to confine and define the region. The political act of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo changed the artistic landscape in unpredictable ways, culture and traditional art making practices adapted to the changes wrought by annexation, and later, statehood.

Changing Definitions of Folk Art

In this borderland between Mexican culture and US territory, art flourished. The art of the Southwest during the 19th century is in an unusual position, because it was created by people who were not academically trained as artists in the tradition of Western art academies. Their work did not correspond to the stylistic sensibilities of US American elites who dominated aesthetic taste. Even in the modern field of art history there has traditionally been little recognition of folk and vernacular traditions. Folk art as a field emerged in 19th-century Europe to preserve the arts and traditions of cultural minority groups.²⁴ The 1876 US Centennial spurred an interest in local American history and

²² Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 24.

²³ Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, 24.

²⁴ Gerard C. Wertkin, “Introduction” in *Encyclopedia of American Folk Art* (Florence, United States: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), xxxii.

material culture, but because art history did not exist in the United States in the 19th century, there was little structure for categorizing, discussing, or displaying folk objects.²⁵ Folk art can be defined from the perspective of art history or ethnography, or both; it is a broad category with mutable boundaries that depend on the scholar or curator's training.²⁶ Art historians in the 20th century contributed to the creation of stylistic boundaries and how an object could be categorized as folk art. Museums often categorize art of the 19th-century Southwest as folk art because of the preconceived notion that these artists had little artistic training, and the style of the objects was passed down from generation to generation. These definitions are now understood to be an arbitrary means of categorizing art objects, as the contemporary definition of art is very broad. The introduction of material culture as an academic discipline in the 1990's further challenged the delineation between art and object.

Introduction to MOIFA

The International Museum of Folk Art, established in 1953, shaped perceptions of folk-art trends in the United States, through their collection of folk objects from around the world and folk-art exhibitions. The museum was founded by Florence Dibell Bartlett, a folk-art collector.²⁷ Its establishment in New Mexico is not coincidental; some of the museum's connection to collecting and art markets is linked to an earlier 20th-century

²⁵ Gerard C. Wertkin, "Introduction," in *Encyclopedia of American Folk Art* (Florence, United States: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), xxxiii.

²⁶ Wertkin, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of American Folk Art*, xxxii.

²⁷ "About Us: Our History" Museum of International Folk Art, last modified May 21, 2007, <https://www.internationalfolkart.org/about/our-history/>.

group called the Spanish Colonial Arts Society. SCAS established the Spanish Market, an art market in Santa Fe dedicated to Hispanic artists of New Mexico working in traditional art forms in 1929.²⁸ The market had connected buyers to artists and artisans since the beginning of the 20th century, providing collectors access to recent New Mexican folk art objects. The market first ran from 1929 to 1934, then languished until Elizabeth Boyd (E. Boyd) revived it in the 1960's. Boyd is an important figure in the history of MOIFA, as she wrote several definitive texts in the field of Hispanic folk art.²⁹ From 1951-1970 she was curator at the Museum of New Mexico, of which MOIFA is a branch.³⁰ Although she was not the first curator of MOIFA, her legacy shaped how the museum exhibited and wrote about folk art.

There are several exhibitions through which the changing attitudes on folk art can be tracked: *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico* (1959, curated by E. Boyd), *The Idea of Folk Art* (1963), *What Is Folk Art?* (1973-76) *Dias de Mas*, *Dias de Menos* (1976), and *Rio Grande Weaving* (1979, curated by Nora Fisher). Another important means to track changing scholarly attitudes is through books, which the museum published alongside exhibitions or as research volumes. The museum, open since 1953, produces exhibitions, texts, and programming that encourages the public to learn more about folk art. Their definition of folk art has changed over the years, and this change affects how they categorize and analyze their collection objects. The goal of this thesis is to consider

²⁸ Donna Pierce and Marta Weigle, *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. II* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 26-28.

²⁹ From this point forward, this thesis will refer to her as E. Boyd, which was the way she preferred her name to be published.

³⁰ "E. BOYD, 71, WRITER ON THE SOUTHWEST," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1974.

MOIFA as a site of cultural production and the museum's influence on the academic field of folk art, especially Hispanic folk art. It will examine research over time from the museum and other sources through object case studies of a textile and tinwork art form. This thesis argues that the museum provides historical context for objects but deemphasizes the political and economic change within the New Mexico territory and how this context influenced the form and content of *colcha* embroideries and tinwork *nichos*. The museum's initial 20th-century definition of folk art as naïve and traditional downplays the complex geopolitical circumstances in which these objects emerged. Over time, the museum's initial narrow definition of folk art broadened and became more inclusive as scholarship in art history and material culture influenced attitudes about folk art.

Introduction to case studies

This thesis focuses on two types of objects produced in Mexican communities in New Mexico: *colcha* blankets and tinwork *nichos*. These objects come from Mexican craft traditions that predate US annexation. Establishment of US trade via the Santa Fe Trail (pioneered in 1821) and US occupation through the Mexican American War (1846-1848) impacted their manufacture and appearance. Annexation and the wave of Anglo settlers arriving in the territory changed the available materials, motifs, and forms of both *colcha* and *nichos*. They were both commonly made in the New Mexico territory in the second half of the 19th century, and they reflect changing artistic trends after annexation. Objects dating from 1848-1911 represent a turbulent period of New Mexico's history where the economic and political landscape changed rapidly, yet both art forms survived

annexation and continued in the 20th century. When art collectors in early 20th-century Santa Fe began acquiring Hispanic art, these objects' fates once again changed. Their acquisition by MOIFA changed the perception of these pieces from functional object to art object. *Colcha* changed stylistically and formally in the period between annexation and statehood, due to the influx of American made products. Tinwork did not exist as an art form in New Mexico before annexation but quickly became an important art style in the region after 1848. Both objects reveal the impact of national trade on local artisans: new materials changed *colcha* stylistically, and the availability of tin made tinwork a new art form. They demonstrate how culture can change over time while still retaining distinct traditions and stylistic identities from other arts produced in this period.

Methodology: Material Culture Studies

While rooted in art historical analysis, the study of material culture extends the means for interpreting culture.³¹ Art history and material culture share similar analytical methods, including the description of objects and stylistic analysis. Both stylistic analysis and iconography are highly geographically bound and following patterns of style is an excellent method of research because stylistic change usually represents a larger cultural shift. Material culture, the study through artifacts of the values of a society at a given time, expanded art historical inquiry.³² Objects beyond the traditional scope of "fine art" are valuable as historical evidence, pieces of the past that still exist in the present.³³

³¹ Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter," *Art As Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 7.

³² Definition adapted from Jules Prown's essay "Mind in Matter."

³³ Prown, "Mind in Matter," 73.

Objects are tangible symbols of human societies. Material culture examines inherent and attached value, the survival of objects throughout history, how they are representative, and how they create cultural perspective. By focusing on art objects made in southwestern communities influenced by Mexican traditions, this thesis will analyze objects using a material culture methodology, and thereby removing the cultural cast of dominant white US culture and the biases of traditional art history practice. Originally, these objects were only viewed within the culture that made them. These people understood the inherent and attached value of the materials and the iconography. The artisans of the New Mexico territory incorporated new materials from the east coast into traditional forms, creating a new style of object within a recognizable format. While *colcha* blankets and tinwork *nichos* were functional and used in situ, when museums began collecting them as traditional examples of craft from a regional subculture in the United States, they imposed the title of folk art on these objects. The communities they came from did not give them the name of folk art, rather cultural institutions put them in that category. This thesis will use material culture methodology to question how the museum categorized and defined an object, and how objects are primary source evidence for understanding different cultures. The next chapters will include formal analysis of *colchas* and *nichos* and material culture analysis of change stemming from US economic incursions and change in materials.

Literature Review

American folk-art traditions are geographically distinct. Geography shaped many art traditions on the North American continent, like the southwest. Mexico influenced the

Southwest while it was still part of Mexican territory, and the region also has myriad indigenous traditions. The veneration of Catholic saints and Catholic imagery is a cornerstone for southwestern folk art and folk ways, as well as the presence of secular traditions. A lot of what has been written on New Mexican and southwestern folk arts comes out of the University of New Mexico and Museum of New Mexico Press, making the study of these objects more regional unless museums or universities outside the area have strong holdings in southwestern arts. Folk art in New Mexico has received scholarly attention, especially because several traditions like metalworking and the creation of *santos* continue today. Objects that are less connected to a living tradition, are analyzed in the realm of scholarly or museum texts, because they are currently held in museum collections.

Several important texts on folk art in New Mexico are connected to the Museum of International Folk Art. One such book is *Popular Arts of New Mexico*, written by E. Boyd who worked as a curator at MOIFA in the 1960s. Published in 1974, her book is the first text on folk art in New Mexico. *Popular Arts of New Mexico* is wide ranging, covering metalwork, textiles, woodworking (sculpture and furniture), and architecture. It is the first comprehensive book examining Hispanic art practices in New Mexico, as research before this appeared piecemeal in newspaper articles or books. This book introduces many objects of different mediums, united by the fact that they were made in New Mexico. Boyd writes about *colcha* and *nichos*, and her work provided the basis for future scholars of these objects. Boyd does use the term folk art in her book, referring to the root word “volk” from German, relating the study folk art back to its European origin

and reveals her training in western, European art history. Boyd was a foundational force in the museum, but in writing the book on the subject, and being one of the only experts at the time, the book occasionally veers into her own opinion on the style of art objects, and which ones are “good” and “bad,” rather than acknowledging how stylistic change indicates cultural changes. Boyd, as a white American, wrote from her perspective as an art historian trained in the Western canon, and her bias towards high art sways her formal analyses. The book is an effective case study for the early characterization of folk art by art historians, serving as a time capsule for attitudes and opinions on non-academic art in the 1960s and 1970s.

Other books that discuss *nichos* and *colcha* exist, but most of these sources present them as niche objects within the larger umbrellas of Hispanic textiles and Hispanic tinwork. Nora Fisher, a previous textile curator at MOIFA, wrote the main body of scholarly literature on textiles in New Mexico. Fisher specialized in textiles of Mexico, New Mexico, and Colorado and analyzed many more textile forms than this thesis can cover. *Colcha* is one facet of a robust weaving tradition in the Southwest, and Fisher contributed to museum catalogues published in conjunction with textile exhibitions including *Rio Grande Textiles* and *Spanish Textile Tradition of New Mexico and Colorado*. The detriment of introductory survey texts is that no one textile group receives deep scholarly analysis. The study of *colcha* usually focuses on the 1940’s revival, because *colcha* artists contributed oral histories and in person discussions of their embroideries. Most current (late 20th century and 21st century) *colcha* artists discuss how they learned their trade; the revival saw a strong emphasis on women teaching women the

craft but intergenerational teaching was lacking due to the decline in *colcha* in the early 20th century.³⁴ Authors typically include a history of *colcha* along with analysis of its 20th-century evolution. Other contributing authors include Nancy Benson with *New Mexico Colcha Club* and Susan Macaulay's academic writing on *colcha*. Benson worked with one of the leaders of the 20th-century *colcha* revival while writing her book, and the second half presents the revival as a feminist reappraisal of women's craft as art. Macaulay's work links *colcha* to geography, memory, and space and is the most nuanced and granular scholarship currently available on *colcha*, although Macaulay mostly focuses on the Colorado *colcha* tradition. The distinct geographic history and regionality of *colcha* means research on the subject is rather niche. Three writers (Fisher, Benson, and Macaulay) create a field of reference with room for more research on this art tradition.

Tinwork is likewise a niche research topic. The most comprehensive volume on tinwork is *New Mexican Tinwork: 1840-1940* by Lane Coulter and Maurice Dixon. Published in 1990, it is a foundational volume on New Mexican tinwork. Coulter and Dixon undertook the gigantic task of attributing New Mexican tinwork to various workshops known to exist in Santa Fe and other cities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Both authors have metalworking experience, so their artistic perspectives are as helpful as their art historical research. Their work on stylistic attributions of region and artisan shaped the

³⁴ For reference, see works by Nancy Benson and Susan Macaulay who are two historians focused on historical, revival, and contemporary *colcha* and they have writing on the way that textiles can represent memory and the impact of gender on *colcha* for contemporary artists.

scholarship on *nichos* but the book focuses far more on aesthetic groups than contextual analysis. However, because the text is so detailed and comprehensive, most current scholarship on tinwork cites this book.

MOIFA published numerous books to support exhibitions of their objects, but few books are written about the history of the museum itself. Museums do not usually undertake book length introspections, which is where other researchers come in. MOIFA published four of the above books (*Popular Arts of New Mexico*, *Rio Grande Textiles*, *Spanish Textile Tradition of New Mexico and Colorado*, and *New Mexican Tinwork*), therefore these texts are an excellent starting point for understanding the museum's objects. The books also reveal opinions and research on folk art, from the museum's founding to today. As a cultural institution, MOIFA is a site of cultural production that researches folk art and contributes to the greater dialogue about folk art in art history. There are few, if any, examples of scholars interacting with the museum collection as a site that actively produces and influences the definition and public conception of folk art. Most publications come from within the museum and are written by curators, therefore the writing is limited to the perspective of just a few people. The writers of these books acknowledge change in New Mexico (during the territorial period 1848-1911) in a very superficial way. None of the books emphasize the seismic change in the lives and livelihoods of New Mexicans after annexation. The contribution of this thesis is twofold: first, it will present object analysis in the context of the large-scale political, geographic, and economic changes occurring in the territory after annexation, and second, it will

consider how the museum characterized these objects over time. Attitudes about folk art evolved and so did the museum's representation of the cultural, geographic, and economic influences on the Spanish folk art objects.

Chapter outline

The introduction outlined the historical context of the American Southwest, introduced the Museum of International Folk Art, and presented the argument and the methodology. Chapter 2 focuses on *colcha* textiles, their aesthetic change from 1848-1900, and what economic systems impacted their creation. Chapter 3 focuses on tinwork *nichos*, how tinwork emerged as a New Mexican art form following US annexation, and how *nichos* were both religious sites and examples of recycling in folk art. Chapter 4 examines how the Museum of International Folk Art created past exhibitions on folk art and how it characterized folk objects, especially *colcha* and *nichos*. The final chapter is the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: COLCHA

Colcha is a textile tradition popular in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. The Spanish word *colcha* means coverlet or quilt, however, New Mexicans typically call any bed covering a *colcha*.³⁵ The word also refers to a specific type of embroidery stitch, and embroidered works using this technique are also called *colcha*. Historians disagree about how this technique came to New Spain whether through the influence of textiles from the Spanish Empire's far reaching global trade routes or if it was an invention of the Spanish settlers. This chapter will intersperse historical context with six different *colcha* examples from the collection of the Museum of International Folk Art. *Colcha* textiles and embroideries are defined by two things: wool ground cloth and wool thread. Wool formed the foundation of textiles produced in New Spain in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries before US annexation. The wave of Anglo settlers arriving in the territory after annexation changed the import market. This altered available materials, motifs, and forms of *colcha* following 1848. This chapter situates these textiles as objects affected by US trade and commerce, which contributed to a change over time in the appearance and materials of this folk tradition. It will also review curators' writing on *colcha* and examine how they discuss historical change in their analyses. Past folk art scholars looked down on objects that were the result of intercultural encounter, preferring objects they believed were "pure" examples of culture without external influences. This chapter

³⁵ Teresa Archuleta-Sagel, "Textiles," in *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. I* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 152.

argues that large scale cultural change influenced the geographic and economic landscape and therefore the livelihoods of the weavers and embroiderers of New Mexico more than prior curators acknowledged. The goal is to situate *colcha* as an object with intercultural influence within the changing sociopolitical and economic landscape in the US in the 19th century. The conclusion will discuss *colcha* today, and how perspectives changed following museum collecting and the 20th century *colcha* revival.

The oldest *colcha* textiles depended on wool production. Spanish colonists brought churro sheep to New Spain in the early 16th century.³⁶ The sheep adapted well to the desert, able to survive several days without water.³⁷ The herds of churro sheep expanded and flourished while the number of colonists in New Spain fluctuated due to the environmental conditions and clashes with the Indigenous people of the region. The long-stapled wool of the churro was ideal for home spinning and weaving.³⁸ A wool staple is a cluster of wool that is spun into the yarn. Long staples create good yarn resistant to breakage or fraying. By the end of the 18th century, wool abounded in New Spain. In 1803 alone, Santa Fe de Nuevo Mexico exported some 26,000 sheep to the neighboring southern territory of Nueva Vizcaya and other locations in the Viceroyalty of New Spain.³⁹ Few surplus goods existed in New Spain, but wool was one of them: even the poorest households could afford a lot of yarn. Sheep were plentiful so wool was low in value. In 1810, the Anglo-American soldier Zebulon Pike reported that merchants in

³⁶ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 30.

³⁷ Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club*, 30.

³⁸ Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club*, 46.

³⁹ Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club*, 44.

northern New Spain sold high-quality, imported textiles for the equivalent of twenty-five dollars per yard, whereas New Mexico sheep sold for just one dollar a head.⁴⁰ Sheep and wool products were important commodities that provided saleable surpluses and assets to obtain imports, thus connecting Spanish settlers to the goods produced in other parts of the viceroyalty.⁴¹

This wool surplus filled the textile needs of the people of New Spain. Wool made up every textile, from clothing to feed sacks, bedding, mattresses, and rugs.⁴² *Colcha* differs from other textiles of the region because it incorporates embroidery, rather than the design being woven in on a loom.⁴³ Vegetal dyes added color, sourced from the flora of New Spain. *Colcha* includes two main elements: the stitching yarn and the ground cloth. Weavers spun wool on one of two devices: the *torno ahilado* (upright spinning wheel) or a hand spindle called a *huso* or a *malacate*.⁴⁴ The ground cloth is *sabanilla*, a white wool fabric produced on a treadle loom. It is a plain weave fabric (meaning the fabric has the same number of warp and weft threads) and is made with natural wool to produce a white or off-white textile.⁴⁵ The typical *sabanilla* cloth was thirty inches wide

⁴⁰ Simmons qtd. in Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 99.

⁴¹ John O. Baxter, *Las carneradas: sheep trade in New Mexico, 1700-1860* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1987), IX.

⁴² Deborah Slaney, *Wonders of the Weavers: nineteenth century Rio Grande weavings from the collection of the Albuquerque Museum* (Albuquerque: The Albuquerque Museum Press, 2005), 1.

⁴³ Loomed blankets were made in this time period and geographic area, I just did not choose to include them in the scope of my writing. *Sabanilla* cloth was loom woven and then embroidered by hand, so the presence of looms is still important to the analysis of *colcha*. There are records of looms present in Santa Fe in the 18th century, see Slaney, *Wonders of the Weavers*, 7-12.

⁴⁴ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 45.

⁴⁵ Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club*, 63.

and had some twelve to twenty-two threads per inch, creating a loose and open weave.⁴⁶ The open weave allowed embroiderers to pass their yarn through the cloth quickly. To make a larger textile, the sewer joined multiple widths of *sabanilla* to create bedcovers, altar cloths, and rugs.

To create a *colcha*, women joined *sabanilla* to achieve the desired width and length, and then embroidered the cloth completely. They covered the entire ground textile in *colcha* stitches, making the textiles thick, warm, and sturdy due to two layers of wool. The *colcha* stitch is the other identifying aspect of this textile art, employing a long laid stitch and a short diagonal tacking stitch. This stitch is efficient for covering a lot of ground and is seen in many global embroidery traditions.⁴⁷ Although men carded the wool and ran the looms, women did sewing tasks, including embroidery. The Museum of International Folk Art owns three wool-on-wool *colchas*. Identifying *colcha* by their material is common museum practice: in this case both the *sabanilla* and the embroidery yarn are wool, hence the term wool-on-wool. These textiles share several characteristics: they are large, made of wool, with abstract or floral motifs. Two of the textiles (one dated to ca. 1866 and one without a date, but probably made in Taos, NM) employed similar color schemes of white, brown, and blue thread in different pattern motifs.⁴⁸ (see Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 6) All three are large, between six and a half and eight and a half feet long by

⁴⁶ Nora Fisher, “Colcha Embroidery,” in *Spanish Textile Tradition of New Mexico and Colorado, Museum of International Folk Art* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1979), 155.

⁴⁷ Nora Fisher, “Colcha Embroidery,” in *Rio Grande Textiles: A New Edition of Spanish Textile Tradition of New Mexico and Colorado* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1994), 119.

⁴⁸ I will be using these small reference details to tell one *colcha* from the other in this thesis, it seemed like an easier naming system than their accession numbers. Textiles are not usually art objects that get named, and I picked details from the registrar’s report that are arbitrary and make sense to me.

three and a half to four and a half feet wide.⁴⁹ The use of these objects is not precisely known. Due to the origin of the word *colcha*, use as a bedspread or quilt is likely. None of the museum's *colchas* show wear or dirt consistent with the wear on a rug, so it is probable they were bed coverings or wall hangings. Their status as indoor objects preserved the dye colors on all three *colcha* and allowed for later analysis, which allows art historians a glimpse into the dyeing process.

All three utilize natural dye, and the difference in the dye lots is visible on the embroidery. The white and brown colors are undyed wool that comes from the fleece of light or dark sheep, and these areas show natural color variation. The difference in the brown yarn is especially apparent on the ca. 1866 *colcha*. Dyeing had inconsistencies, noticeable where the blue color changes frequently on the 1866 and the Taos *colcha*. The blue, obtained from indigo dye, skews darker, lighter, or more purple on both objects.⁵⁰ Likewise, different batches of yarn reacted to dye differently, creating slight color variation especially in the Taos *colchas*. The blue scallops on the border appear to be a different yarn group than the central blue scallops, because they are a different shade of blue. (See Figure 2) The ca. 1866 and Taos *colchas* display more abstract patterns of curved arches and zigzags, with some elements that may be floral or natural, but the last wool on wool object has a more apparent natural motif. This *colcha* shows a design of

⁴⁹ As I was not able to get a perspective from above the *colcha*, not all of my photographs are full length

⁵⁰ The dyers of New Mexico used a variety of indigo native to the western hemisphere (*Indigofera anil*) but the Spanish crown also imported indigo indigenous to the east (*Indigofera tinctoria*) to their new colonies. There is no indication that old world indigo could be raised in New Mexico. The museum reports do not indicate which indigo was used, only that it is confirmed to be indigo, see E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico*, 175.

flowers and vines between brown stripes on a white ground. This piece displays more color variety, including yellow, coral, and green alongside white, brown, and blue. The museum textile curators found cochineal dye in the pink yarn of this object. Records of cochineal dyeing date to before the Spanish colonial period, because the cochineal beetle lives in cactuses native to the North American continent. Crushed cochineal powder became a prized natural resource for the Spanish. One past curator of MOIFA, E. Boyd, asserts that cochineal dye was such a valuable trade good, Spain sent all cochineal to Europe to sell for their own profit and use and little circulated in Mexico. Boyd argues that most cochineal dye left the country until 1856, when German researchers successfully created chemical synthetic dyes. Therefore, the presence of cochineal in New Mexico blankets or wool embroidery is a justifiable criterion for assigning it a date of roughly 1830-1870.⁵¹ This is one method for textile dating that suggests an imperial colonial system established to extract natural resources for economic gain which is a legitimate characterization of the Spanish empire.⁵² Whether or not cochineal was present, textile dating is frequently disputed.

However, the weaving industry in New Spain shifted after an important political event. In 1821, Spanish colonial rule of New Spain ended, promoting political and

⁵¹ E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 176.

⁵² Barbara C. Anderson, "Evidence of Cochineal's Use in Painting," in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45, no. 3 (2015): 337–66. See especially 338-345. There is strong evidence of cochineal's movement across Europe and Asia due to both established land trade routes, and extant painting and textile examples using cochineal red dye or paint. See also: Elena Phipps, *Cochineal Red: The Art History of a Color* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010).

economic change in newly independent Mexico. The trade monopoly with Spain was abolished, allowing Mexico to interact with its geographic neighbors, including the United States.⁵³ US businessmen, traders, and entrepreneurs saw opportunity for establishing trade with Mexico and began sending caravans of goods to the Mexican territories, creating the Santa Fe Trail.⁵⁴ In 1821, Mexico controlled land north of the Rio Grande river, including the modern states of New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California. US traders sent some items and goods to the territory for the very first time that year. The Industrial Revolution reached the eastern United States in the early 19th century, and many manufactured items, including calico cloth, ribbons, nails, pins, needles, metal tools and hardware, mirrors and glass were commercially manufactured and inexpensive. These items became popular trade items in Santa Fe.⁵⁵ The influx of tinned food with US Army troops brought scrap tin to the territory for the first time, which New Mexico artisans did not let go to waste (and will be covered in the next chapter). Machine woven fabric arrived on the Santa Fe trail and began to be incorporated into the textile art of the region. Commercial fabric changed *colcha* by providing an alternative ground material, facilitating the creation wool on cotton objects. Makers stitched wool yarn onto a cotton ground. It is important to note that several wool-on-wool and wool-on-cotton *colchas* are dated around the same time because these two traditions occurred concurrently.

⁵³ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 68.

⁵⁴ Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club*, 70.

⁵⁵ Donna Pierce, "Historical Introduction," in *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. I* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 10.

MOIFA has two 19th century wool-on-cotton *colchas*. Both have industrially woven cotton ground cloth. The fabric has a diagonal twill weave, and the embroidery designs scattered across the surface. These objects usually feature a seam connecting two widths of fabric, because these examples of *colcha* are also large (both close to 4.5 feet by 7 feet). On one, dated between 1840-1865, five borders of floral motifs surround the center motif of seven prancing deer (see Figures 11 and 12). The other, dated 1865-1880 has rows of floral designs in the center, and smaller flowers form a rectangular border. (See Figure 13) The later *colcha* has a pink and white fringe on three sides, but curators think the fringe was added later. Both pieces tested positive for cochineal dye. Several New Mexico plants including snakeweed, canaigre, Indian paintbrush, and chamisa produce yellow dye that may have been used here.⁵⁶ The presence of cochineal and fringe indicate newly accessible materials available to the embroiderers. Cochineal dye is a local material that was unavailable due to colonial restrictions, but whose market and accessibility changed after Mexican Independence. Likewise, the woven trim is potentially an imported good, whose presence on the *colcha* signals both a market evolution and the fact that these textiles were living objects that successive owners modified.⁵⁷ The influx of American goods and Anglo people impacted traditional New Mexican arts and would have more impact before the end of the 20th century.

When the US annexed the southwestern territory, it came under the jurisdiction of the US government. That meant that Anglo citizens accessed the new territory in ways that

⁵⁶ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It*. (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 61.

⁵⁷ Textile curators at MOIFA believe the fringe was added later.

were previously closed off. Import taxes from the Mexican government vanished, and every sector- land, commerce, politics- opened for American infiltration. The introduction discussed the history of land grants in the New Mexico territories. When Mexican farmers could not prove their grants were legal in the eyes of a Mexican court, US courts frequently dismissed them. The loss of land impacted Mexican farmers, but it also impacted their herds. The reduction of land belonging to Mexican farmers reduced the grazing land for churro flocks, whose wool was a staple in the region's arts. During the Civil War, when the demand for wool was strong, Eastern weavers brought Merino sheep to crossbreed with the churros. The wool of the crossbred sheep increased in weight, resulting in fleeces that were heavier but much harder to process in the traditional fashion.⁵⁸ This new fleece found its way into yarn production, but resulted in handmade yarn of such poor quality, few families continued to produce it.⁵⁹ The change in yarn was a slow process, that was rooted in dishonest land acquisition and sheep breeding for profit, but it impacted New Mexican arts profoundly. The environmental changes wrought by the US annexation changed *colcha* once again.

Cotton-on-cotton *colcha* demonstrate that regional culture is affected by large scale economic change. Unlike its predecessors, cotton-on-cotton *colcha* only uses cotton materials, and both the cloth and the yarn were commercially manufactured. Cotton grew poorly in New Mexico, due to its water needs and labor intensity, so it was eschewed in

⁵⁸ Deborah Slaney, *Wonders of the Weavers: nineteenth century Rio Grande weavings from the collection of the Albuquerque Museum* (Albuquerque: The Albuquerque Museum Press, 2005), 13.

⁵⁹ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 83.

the region in favor of wool.⁶⁰ The political incursion of the US government changed environmental conditions through political intervention, which in turn altered traditional artistic materials, like churro wool. Plentiful commercial alternatives abounded, so artisans chose those instead. The one 19th-century cotton-on-cotton example at MOIFA is made up of two widths of commercial cotton drill with the original selvages intact. (See Figures 9 and 10) The embroidery yarn is Saxony yarn, a type manufactured on the east coast by German immigrants and known by its brand name.⁶¹ The makers used Saxony yarn in the same way as wool yarn, with colorful embroidered images scattered across a white background using the *colcha* stitch. This *colcha* was an altar cloth dated circa 1865, which used to belong to a small church in Llano de Santa Barbara.⁶² Two different floral designs run parallel to each other, one with a central vine that winds in an s curve in the center, the other made up of several neat rows of flowers. Due to the way altar cloths are typically draped over the front of the altar for the congregation to see, this altar cloth could have utilized the two different designs for different liturgical seasons. It is unlike the other *colcha* examples because it displays two different design motifs side by side, rather than the same design all over or one design mirrored on an axis. Floral motifs are the dominant imagery in these *colchas*, and there is much academic speculation about where the embroiderers drew their inspiration from.

⁶⁰ Slaney, *Wonders of the Weavers*, 5.

⁶¹ E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 214.

⁶² Llano de Santa Barbara no longer exists, and neither does the church, but the information on the altar cloth was given at the time of its collection. See: Nora Fisher, *Rio Grande Textiles*, 129.

Colcha historians disagree on the provenance of the floral motif in New Mexican textiles. There are very few primary sources on these embroideries, so several secondhand sources theorize how a design motif reached the poor and remote northern territories of New Spain. Some authors say Spanish, Moorish, Indian, and Asian textiles influenced the patterns.⁶³ Others believe the colonists might have been inspired by the floral designs they saw on Indian chintz, or Asian silk shawls, both of which would have been imported to New Spain through the Spanish empire.⁶⁴ One author traces a long lineage of traditions: the Iberian influences are seen in rose and pomegranate designs and leafy scrolls, the open paisley designs of the 19th century can be linked to textiles in the Middle East. Spanish embroiderers absorbed eastern influences, and those Spanish works made their way to Mexico where embroiderers might have combined design ideas with those they saw on trade goods arriving from Asia.⁶⁵ There is evidence of Spanish ships sailing from what is today the Philippines to Mexico, therefore Asia goods and textiles were present in Mexico in the colonial period.⁶⁶ It is hard to trace the movement of specific goods across the continent, but evidence exists that colonists in New Spain encountered multiple types of European and Asian textiles that may have inspired their own work.

⁶³ Deborah Slaney, *Wonders of the Weavers: nineteenth century Rio Grande weavings from the collection of the Albuquerque Museum* (Albuquerque: The Albuquerque Museum Press, 2005), 40.

⁶⁴ Teresa Archuleta-Sagel, "Textiles," in *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. I* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 154.

⁶⁵ Mary Montañó, *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanos: Hispano Arts and Culture of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 127-128

⁶⁶ Nora Fisher, *Rio Grande Textiles: A New Edition of Spanish Textile Tradition of New Mexico and Colorado* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1994), 125.

The last geographic change that dealt a blow to *colcha* making was the arrival of the railroad in New Mexico in 1878. The railroad brought a flood of commercial goods from the east that destabilized local textile practices, *colcha* among them.⁶⁷ As commercial cloth became cheaper and more plentiful, handwoven textiles fell out of fashion. Research on the history of *colcha*, especially the work of Nora Fisher, note this change in production, as the number of *colchas* dated 1900-1920 fell rapidly. Two former MOIFA curators have this to say about the perceived decline of *colcha* in the late 19th and early 20th century: Nora Fisher writes: “It appears that the making of *colcha embroidery* lost impetus toward the end of the nineteenth century.”⁶⁸ Another former curator, who helped establish MOIFA in the 1960’s, Elizabeth Boyd wrote: “Stitchery declined in quality as did planning of patterns, which grew helter-skelter as whimsical inscriptions... and symbols in gaudy colors replaced handsome older designs.”⁶⁹ These interpretations are the value judgements of art historians considering an object unto itself, and its inherent value, and they prefer purity of tradition over cultural change even if these objects were almost always in flux. In material culture, inherent value deals with an object’s worth, through its physical materials. Attached value, meanwhile, emphasizes the intangible: style, taste, and iconic or associational value.⁷⁰ Style is incredibly subjective and changes over time, as *colcha* demonstrates. Both curators express disappointment at the change in style due to changes in materials. They see part of the inherent value in *colcha* as purity

⁶⁷ Nancy C. Benson, *New Mexico Colcha Club: Spanish Colonial Embroidery & the Women Who Saved It* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2008), 84.

⁶⁸ Fisher, *Rio Grande Textiles*, 131.

⁶⁹ E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 218.

⁷⁰ Jules Prown, “Mind in Matter,” *Art As Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 4.

of the materials, including handwoven cloth and handspun yarn. When the materials became ready-made, in the minds of Fisher and Boyd, the inherent value dropped because the traditional materials were abandoned. However, this ignores the attached value of a handiwork tradition, because *colcha* continued for generations. Even if the materials and aesthetic outcome and therefore inherent value changed, the attached value is steadfast in a tradition of women's art that refused to die out.

Global trade and commerce affected *colcha* from the beginning. As early as the Spanish colonial period, Mexico was linked to a system of global trade. Many of the books consulted for research extensively discuss the development of textile arts in New Spain, the arrival and importance of sheep, the tools necessary for weaving and spinning that also had to be sourced or built. They acknowledge the difference in the periods of Mexican independence and American annexation, and how American traders brought products to the area that were new and destabilized the previous Mexican economic systems. There is very little writing connecting these environmental factors to the art form itself. Global trade affected this art form from its first iteration to the most recent versions. The decrease in "quality" as perceived by Boyd is a judgement of the change of materials, without acknowledging the art form has persevered for three centuries with some changes of medium and style. There is no one specific style that can be considered traditional, because it has changed so much over time.

Sometimes folk art is categorized as a static tradition that does not change- it follows a tradition and that's that. This is a view of folk art that does not consider the environmental, political, and geographic changes acting on a group of people. As *colcha*

demonstrates, folk art has the capacity to absorb changes the makers could not predict or have control over. As their media changed, they continued to produce a form of *colcha*, albeit with new materials. Change is a constant in art history, and changing folk art practices deserve research and recognition into the cultural change in the pertinent geographic areas. Both Nora Fisher and Elizabeth Boyd contributed immensely to the scholarship on *colcha* embroidery and research on textile making in New Mexico. Their expertise raised Hispanic textile traditions from relative obscurity to important exhibition objects in the museum collection. Their cultural perspective, however, was that of white art historians with an ingrained knowledge of the Western hierarchy of art and therefore their judgements sometimes followed style lines of high and low style, which is an exclusive way to consider folk art from outside the cultural perspective of its makers. Their appraisal of the objects were influenced by contemporary thoughts about folk art (and Elizabeth Boyd's curatorial approach will be covered in a later chapter). The goal of this thesis is to advance the scholarship on *colcha* by drawing lines of connection to political, economic, and environmental factors into this art historical discourse. Folk art is a product of its culture, and as *colcha* in New Mexico proves, it can weather a great deal of change and still be a valuable cultural artifact.



Figure 1: White, brown, and blue wool on wool *colcha* c. 1866



Figure 3: Detail of back of c. 1866 *colcha*



Figure 2: Detail of c. 1866 *colcha*



Figure 4: Image of 19th century wool on wool *colcha* made in Taos



Figure 5: Detail of Taos *colcha*



Figure 7: Early 20th century wool on wool *colcha*



Figure 6: Detail of back of Taos *colcha*



Figure 8: Detail of fringe of early 20th century *colcha*



Figure 9: Altar cloth *colcha* c. 1865



Figure 11: Wool on cotton *colcha* with deer
c. 1840-1865



Figure 10: Detail of altar cloth *colcha*



Figure 12: Detail of wool on cotton *colcha*
with deer



Figure 13: *Colcha* bedspread c. 1865-1880

CHAPTER 3: *NICHOS*

Of all the folk-art traditions from Mexico that were practiced in the territorial area of New Mexico, tinwork is the newest and most influenced by annexation and the globalization of the American economy. Textiles, metalwork, and woodcarving existed in New Spain during the colonial period, but tinwork owes its genesis to the political incursions of the US government. The US Army arrived in 1846 to occupy Santa Fe during the Mexican American war (1846-1848). The United States Army made a material mark on the territory during this time: the troops needed supplies and shipped in goods from the east. Many of these goods arrived in tin cans, which marked the beginning of the material's availability to New Mexican metal and tinsmiths. Enterprising metalworkers created objects with tin after the boom in its availability, alongside more traditional iron objects. This chapter discusses several tin *nichos* (religious niches) in the collection of the Museum of International Folk Art and argues that they exemplify the impact of international commerce patterns on regional folk art. Tinwork *nichos* are unusual due to their use of recycled materials for domestic sites of devotion. From a material culture perspective, they reveal everyday, nonelite aspects of homemaking and prayer that the large culture may not make visible.⁷¹ They invite the viewer to consider their historical domestic function and how it contrasts with its current museum display practices.

⁷¹ Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter," *Art As Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 4.

Without US occupation, this art form might never have emerged, as the influx of novel material created a new regional tradition, exemplifying the diverse ways folk art can embrace change.

Tin has a utilitarian history in the Americas until mechanical processes allowed smiths to manipulate it in artistic as well as practical ways. There is a history of copper and tin mining in the viceroyalty of New Spain. Spain's quest to extract natural resources from its colonies created the first tin mines in New Spain. England, Spain, and Germany were top manufacturers of tin and tinplate in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, with well-developed processing system and a demand for new raw material.⁷² Warfare in Europe at the end of the 18th century caused an increased demand for copper and tin from the colonies.⁷³ Spain imported raw materials from New Spain for its armament foundries and encouraged the founding of new mines to keep the supply flowing.⁷⁴ The colonial government established copper mines in New Spain (now New Mexico) and it was mined during the colonial (1598-1821) and Mexican (1821-1848) periods in locations north of Abiquiú, east of Albuquerque, and south of Taos.⁷⁵ Sources disagree about whether tin was mined in what is now New Mexico- the tin Spain imported came from what is now Mexico. Regardless, tin in its elemental state required processing that the rural New Mexican territory could not provide. Tinplate, or steel coated in tin, was not widely available in the territories until US incursion.

⁷² Donna Pierce, "Tinwork," in *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. I* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 108.

⁷³ Pierce, "Tinwork," 108.

⁷⁴ Pierce, "Tinwork," 108.

⁷⁵ Donna Pierce qtd. by Marc Simmon, "New Finds on Old Copper," *Santa Fe Reporter*, May 7, 1981.

Tinsmithing, the art of manipulating tinplate, descends from gold and silversmith traditions. Little is known about metalworking in the territories of New Spain in the 17th and 18th centuries, but blacksmiths (those who work with iron) and *plateros* (those who work with silver or gold) in the region produced work dated to this period.⁷⁶ When tinplate became available in large quantities in the 19th century, it lent itself easily to the established metalwork skills of the *plateros*. Tin was popular among metalsmiths for several reasons. It is useful as an alloy to make other metals more durable and pliable. Its resistance to tarnishing made it a popular decorative and protective coating, giving an object a brilliant appearance like silver but without corrosion.⁷⁷ The reflective, brilliant surface made goods look expensive at a fraction of the price. Tinsmiths adapted to the material that was previously less available in the territories, combining resources from the US with traditional techniques and aesthetics from Mexico.⁷⁸ The shiny tin coating made pieces appear to be made of silver, at a price point for those who could not afford pure silver goods. Most tinsmiths produced decorative objects- crosses, *nichos*, frames, chandeliers, and sconces- that were affordable and popular in the territories, which we can infer from by the high number that survive in museum collections. The genre of tinwork is more diverse than this thesis has space to analyze, but it will focus specifically on *nichos*, their aesthetics, functions, and display in the MOIFA collection.

⁷⁶ Robin Farwell Gavin et al, *Traditional Arts of Spanish New Mexico: The Hispanic Heritage Wing at the Museum of International Folk Art* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1994), 67.

⁷⁷ Donna Pierce, "Tinwork," in *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. I* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 104.

⁷⁸ Robin Farwell Gavin et al, *Traditional Arts of Spanish New Mexico: The Hispanic Heritage Wing at the Museum of International Folk Art* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1994), 67.

This thesis focuses on *nichos* as works of folk art with historic and religious significance. *Nichos* qualify as folk art due to their handcrafted status, function as private devotional sites, recycled and mixed media components, and regional nature. *Nichos* are niches made to contain a holy image, hung on the walls of New Mexican homes. They functioned as sites of devotion, where family members could visit the enclosed holy image and pray for help from the saint or figure therein. They differ from *retablos* because most New Mexican *nichos* are metal and most *retablos* are wood. *Nichos* displayed icons or religious images like devotional prints or carved wooden *bultos* and served as a shrine for the household.⁷⁹ *Bultos* are carved wooden figures, usually of Catholic saints. Tinwork *nichos* are a uniquely New Mexican tradition: the tradition of metalwork came from Mexico. Mixed media elements like glass, paint, and paper devotional cards came from Anglo traders but the aesthetic choices for the media was up to the tinsmith.⁸⁰ As religious objects, many feature Catholic imagery, as Catholicism strongly influences Mexican and New Mexican culture. Almost every piece chosen from the MOIFA collection features a Catholic figure, either the Holy Family (Jesus, Mary, or Joseph) or a saint. The tinwork itself depicts religious symbolism, with examples of crosses, doves, and flowers carved into or punched out of the tin.

One *nicho* contains an important icon of Mexican Catholicism: the Virgin of Guadalupe (see Figure 25). According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared on a

⁷⁹ In Spanish, a *retablo* is a frame or shelf enclosing a devotional painting, usually of a saint or religious figure. A *bulto* is a small devotional figure carved out of wood, painted to look like a saint or religious figure. See also: Lane Coulter. "Chapter 4: Functional Types of Spanish Tinwork," *New Mexico Tinwork 1840-1940*. 20.

⁸⁰ *Nichos* are also a tradition in Mexico, but tin *nichos* are a uniquely American invention.

hillside in Tepeyac to an Indigenous convert named Juan Diego in 1531. Mary instructed the man to pick roses and bring them to the Bishop of New Spain, as a sign to build a church on that site.⁸¹ Juan Diego carried the roses in his cloak (*tilma* in Spanish, *tilmatli* in Nahuatl) and when he removed the roses, a miraculous painting of the Virgin Mary had appeared on the fabric.⁸² Her image is believed to have been painted by a divine hand, making the *tilma* one of the most important holy objects in Catholicism. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is one of the most popular holy figures in Latin America. The figure in this *nicho* is recognizable by her pink tunic, blue robe, rays of light around her, and the cherub she stands on. This image is a paper print with a frame that is soldered to the back pieces of the *nicho*. The exterior tin frame surrounds a box that projects forward, with a glass door and glass side panels. This architectural construction allows light to reach the image inside so the viewer can see it. The open space created inside a *nicho* is intentional: they store prints, *bultos*, flowers, *milagros*, and other religious objects.⁸³ The tin frame of this *nicho* creates architectural drama for the object it contains: the frame is crowned by a semi-circular lunette topped with another semicircle that acts like a steeple. Four rectangular border pieces are soldered onto the niche, and decorative corner caps round off the edges. The surrounding tinwork frame mimics the mandorla that surrounds the Virgin of Guadalupe, as another decorative frame surrounding the holy figure. The

⁸¹ Patricia Harrington, "Mother of Death, Mother of Rebirth: The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56, no. 1 (1988): 25.

⁸² Jeanette Favros Peterson, "Creating the Virgin of Guadalupe: The Cloth, the Artist, and Sources in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," *The Americas* 61, no. 4 (2005): 571.

⁸³ A *milagro* is an object meant to symbolize a prayer or petition to God. They are usually small, flat objects stamped out of metal.

tinwork designs and displays inside the *nichos* were also affected by the owners, not just the tinsmiths.

The *nicho* with the Virgin of Guadalupe currently contains several dried flowers, noticeable in the photograph. *Nichos* were not static sites, rather owners would interact with them by placing objects inside, including candles, flowers, photographs, cut paper objects, and prints. The act of placing objects in a religious space is a representational, tactile expression of devotion or prayer. Not many of these additional items made it into the museum collection, perhaps having been removed by art collectors or the museum. The cumulative quality of *nichos* made them living sites of devotion in the home, where the faithful of the household could leave objects as a sign of their reverence for the holy figure or as a request for special protection or aide on a given day. In this way, they function similarly to other home altars.

Another *nicho* in the collection also contains an added object (See Figure 14). This *nicho* has a small wooden *bulto* that is removeable (see Figures 15 and 16).⁸⁴ *Bultos* are one example of additive objects found inside *nichos*. Since most *bultos* are made of wood, and are an established regional tradition, this *nicho* may be older than others in the collection because it contains a carved wooden figure rather than a mass produced lithograph. However, like any additive object, this *bulto* could have been removed from

⁸⁴ In Image 2, the *nicho* is empty. I took this photograph after asking the curator to remove the *bulto* so I could look at the dimensionality of the carving and the paint more closely. The figure was about five inches tall and fit very snugly inside the *nicho*, so it did not need to be affixed in order to stay. The two following photographs are of the *bulto* outside of the *nicho*, to see the detail of the painting. We (the curator and I) attempted to ascertain which religious figure this *bulto* depicted but we did not come to one conclusion, due to the flakiness of the paint many details on this figure are lost.

one site and added to this one. The viewer will never know its path, only that it is now present in the museum, and therefore frozen in time where the cumulative process stopped. Museums preserve and display objects, but they stop any living processes that act on objects when they are collected. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that tactile, ephemeral elements are often missing from *nichos* on display in a museum setting, because museums present objects in a static manner. The living traits of the object link it to how material culture is important to the study of folk art: the discipline allows for examination of objects as evolving, rather than static entities.

Like the gifts left behind by the owners, *nichos* were indelibly shaped by human hands. Tinwork decoration is limited only by the maker's imagination. Tin is malleable and accepts cuts and stamps in its surface easily. This made creating shapes out of tin easy, as well as adding decorative edges like scallops or zigzags. Scoring and carving into the tin with a utensil occurred frequently in tin designs. The tinsmiths used steel or iron punches, with a specific design carved into the end, to decorate the surface of the tin.⁸⁵ Punchwork creates impressions in the surface of the tin and for different looks could be applied from the front (stamping) or the back (embossing) of the tin sheet.⁸⁶ Art historians identified different punches as belonging to specific tinsmiths because their

⁸⁵ Lane Coulter, *New Mexico Tinwork 1840-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 6.

⁸⁶ Lane Coulter, *New Mexico Tinwork 1840-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 9.

designs are seen over and over again on objects.⁸⁷ However, much tinwork is unattributed. There are very few records that connect objects to their makers because they were infrequently signed or dated at the time of their making. What can be traced are the tin cans the tinsmiths salvaged because they often still bear original colors and logos. When turned over, *nichos* reveal a rich details of commercial history on the reverse side.

The survival of logos on *nichos* is an excellent resource for art historians who want to trace their commercial history. The variety of still visible logos demonstrate tinsmith's ingenuity to use the existing properties of the cans as parts of new art objects. The most common cans shipped to Santa Fe contained oysters, coffee, lard, linseed oil, and tobacco (as seen in image 4 where the words White Plume Lard are legible).⁸⁸ Goods arriving via the Santa Fe trail also came in tin containers. Patent markings and labels on the original goods are a helpful way to date New Mexican tinwork if the label can be traced to its manufacturer and when it was patented. The most common places of origin for canned goods were St. Louis, Chicago, Baltimore, Kansas City, and Milwaukee.⁸⁹ Tinsmiths bought the used cans for a few cents from the army quartermaster, then cut them up for later use.⁹⁰ There is no current record of specific tinsmiths preferring cans from certain companies, because of the relative anonymity of most tinsmiths, but there is room for more research on this topic. Recycling was a strong component of *nichos* because New Mexico lacked surplus materials well into the 19th century. Tin cans linked

⁸⁷ A lot of work identifying different tinsmiths has been done by Lane Coulter and Maurice Dixon, whose books on tinwork allow me to take a deep dive into this subject.

⁸⁸ Lane Coulter, *New Mexico Tinwork 1840-1940*, 13.

⁸⁹ Lane Coulter, *New Mexico Tinwork 1840-1940*, 13.

⁹⁰ The Magazine Antiques. "From the Archives: 'New Mexican Tinwork, 1840-1915,'" July 3, 2014.

the developing western territories with the industrialized Midwest and east coast, making them an excellent example of how material culture reveals cultural as well as artistic change.⁹¹

One example of a *nicho* made with identifiable salvaged tin was made by José Maria Apodaca (see Figure 17). In addition to tin, this *nicho* features several imported goods like glass and wallpaper. The *nicho* is currently empty but has ample room to display a religious object like a print or a *bulto* (and its current emptiness does not mean it was always empty). There are two rings of metal soldered inside the niche, likely for holding candles. The frame features three different wallpaper designs, one white, one pink, and one blue. The floral designs repeat Apodaca's hand-stamped flowers that decorate the top and corners of this object. Although each piece wallpaper is distinguishable, there was no attempt to match the patterns in the different sections. It is unknown how tinsmiths accessed wallpaper and whether or not they were using scrap material and had to rely on small pieces. The back of this *nicho* reveals several repurposed cans (see Figures 18, 19, and 20). The logos of four products are still present on the back (White Plume Lard, Saratoga Drips, White Cloud, and one illegible logo). Apodaca placed them on the back so he could manipulate the front for his own design.

⁹¹ Jim Rock qtd. by April White, "Frontier America in a Collection of Tin Cans," *JSTOR Daily*, November 16, 2017. <https://daily.jstor.org/frontier-america-in-a-collection-of-tin-cans/>.

Several *nichos* in the collection contain 19th-century wallpaper (see Figures 17, 21, 22, and 23). The wallpaper is a decorative device. It does not coordinate with the image inside the frame, but instead provides color and a visual counterpoint to the textural, monochrome quality of the tinwork. Most *nichos* with wallpaper show floral designs popular in the late 19th century. Apodaca frequently used wallpaper in his *nichos*, so its presence helps identify his aesthetic. Apodaca worked from about 1870-1910, during the territorial period. In this object, unlike the previous example, the wallpaper matches, but some tinworkers chose multiple different wallpaper designs, as Apodaca did in Image 2. This may be an aesthetic choice or may simply be a necessity because tinworkers did not have a lot of wallpaper and had to be creative with what they had. Homeowners might have brought wallpaper to tinsmiths to make the wallpaper in the *nicho* match the wall it would hang on.⁹² The wallpaper reveals the work of mechanical print rollers because the black outlines of the flowers and leaves do not exactly match up (see Figure 22). The tinwork frame has organic shapes flanking the rectangular frame, so the floral design of the wallpaper complements the curving shapes. There is little information about where wallpaper was manufactured before it was shipped to Santa Fe over the Santa Fe trail.⁹³ Wallpaper is not the only printed material important to the

⁹² The inclusion of wallpaper in *nichos* is a fascinating art historical and material culture occurrence. The research for this paper did not include archival work to discover what a New Mexican home looked like in the territorial period, and if any of these items could be spotted in situ but it is absolutely an avenue for more research.

⁹³ There is little to no existing research on wallpaper use in New Mexican *nichos*. The only source I found describing wallpaper trade was a 1995 interview with a now deceased tinsmith name Rita Younis. Younis stated that “wallpaper came from St. Louis” and this is the only account I have linking the wallpaper to a place outside New Mexico. There is absolutely a scope for researching wallpaper manufacturers in St. Louis, trade manifests for the Santa Fe trail, and which shops in Santa Fe and other cities sold wallpaper but it is not within the scope of this thesis. 19th century American wallpaper manufacturing and its impact on New Mexico folk art is a different research project.

aesthetic appearance of *nichos*, as religious lithographs formed the backbone of extant religious imagery.

Lithographs in New Mexico, and by extension, their appearance in *nichos*, have a specific history. Colonial Spain established a robust Spanish language print culture in New Spain, but there is a noticeable shift when other languages began trickling into the territory. Images of English, French, and German origin arrived in the New Mexico territory over time through illustrated bibles, individual broadsheets, and devotional cards.⁹⁴ Lithography was introduced in Mexico in 1826, but most of the prints seen in *nichos* are of French origin.⁹⁵ Two European publishers, Turgis publishing house and the Benziger brothers, were known to export their prints to the United States and their lithographs appear in tinwork *nichos*.⁹⁶ Another influence on the availability of lithographs in the New Mexico territory was the arrival of a French priest named Jean Baptiste Lamy, a newly appointed bishop who arrived in Santa Fe in 1851.⁹⁷ He brought ecclesiastical reform to the Catholic churches, and established schools, hospitals, and orphanages throughout the territory. Lamy recruited other French priests to the region, from 1864 to 1944, 120 French priests served in the Catholic diocese of New Mexico, making commercial French devotional prints widely available in the New Mexico as a

⁹⁴ Robin Farwell Gavin et al, *Traditional Arts of Spanish New Mexico: The Hispanic Heritage Wing at the Museum of International Folk Art* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1994), 40.

⁹⁵ Maurice Dixon, "Chronology" in *The Artistic Odyssey of Higinio V. Gonzales: A Tinsmith and Poet in Territorial New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), XXXIV.

⁹⁶ Maurice Dixon, "Chronology" in *The Artistic Odyssey of Higinio V. Gonzales: A Tinsmith and Poet in Territorial New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), XXXIV.

⁹⁷ Dixon, *The Artistic Odyssey of Higinio V. Gonzales*, XXXV.

tool to aide of their school and church teachings.⁹⁸ The presence of a French devotional print in an object made by a Hispanic tinsmith is a clear reflection of the globalization of the American economy in the 19th century.

Several *nichos* from the MOIFA collection contain lithographic prints. One contains a Benziger print, identifiable from the tiny publisher's address printed below the figure of Jesus (see Figures 23 and 24). The scene is of a young Jesus feeding doves with food in his hand and water he pours from a chalice. A French phrase below the figure reads: "The joy of perseverance: Jesus nourishes them with his own hand and anoint them with his virtues."⁹⁹ The imagery references the Catholic ceremony of the Eucharist, where wine and bread (here a chalice of water and food) are transubstantiated and Catholics consume the blood and body of Jesus. This print also has a patterned background. The paper on which the lithograph was printed has been stamped in specific areas, creating a latticed background of small holes and leaves that mimic the ivy drawn in the print. The punch holes in the lithographic trade card also mimic the tin punchwork done on the frame of this *nicho*. It is unknown whether the artist had the trade card on hand when they made the *nicho*, but the punchwork creates a lacy, raised surface that unites the visual rhythm of the object. The trade card appears to be sitting on top of another piece of wallpaper that frames the piece, because colors show through the

⁹⁸Clarke Garrett, "French Missionary Clergy Confront the Protestant Menace in New Mexico, 1851-1885," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 33 (2005).

⁹⁹ The original text on the lithograph is in French, and the original French reads: "*Joies de la Perseverance: Jesus les nourrit de sa main il les parfume de ses vertus.*" The translation is mine, with the aid of the internet as I am not a French speaker. The text right underneath the image gives the address of the printers: "Bounasse-Lebei, Imp. Edit 28 et 29, rue St. Sulpice, Paris. 149."

lattice work of the lithograph. This lends dimensionality to the flatness of the print object, similar to the textures of the tinwork itself.

A tinworker made many aesthetic choices: shape, materials, adornments, and additional objects to include. The process of building tiny religious sites with beautifully decorated exteriors demonstrates respect for the sanctity of their use. The recycled media of tin cans is unusual in the arts of this time, when “high art” still focused on making paintings appear to mimic nature. *Nichos* were visibly recycled, especially if the tinsmith chose to include the logo on the front side to reuse the color or pattern. Recycled material became part of a revered holy practice of praying in the home, and the cultural value of *nichos* was high even if their material value was low. Recycled tin may have class implications because it was cheap, and the purchasers of these objects could not afford versions cast in more expensive metals; little is known about whether they were produced for specific consumers and if purchasers had input on their aesthetic appearance. Their inherent value (the cost of materials) is low, due to the recycled materials, but their associational and iconic value is incredibly important. Perhaps patrons commissioned artisans to work specific shapes or motifs for their liking. The large number of *nichos* in the MOIFA collection proves that tinwork *nichos* were popular for devotional practices. They demonstrate that prayer in a domestic space occurred frequently in Hispanic homes across the New Mexico territory.

Without US incursion, tinwork likely would not have developed on the scale it did, if at all. The greater force of US imperialism created a new art form that was distinct to New Mexico and the Catholic religion while also incorporating US American goods.

As with *colcha*, the arrival of the railroad to New Mexico impacted the desire for handmade goods. It did not die out entirely: tinwork continued after New Mexico gained statehood; in several families it was a generational craft tinsmiths passed down. The continued practice of tinwork showed a market desire for the sculptural and decorative aesthetic of tinwork. The practice never went as dormant as *colcha* did, as tinsmiths plied their trade publicly throughout the 20th century. The Santa Fe art market encourage the continued practice of artisans in this regional art form, both for its uniqueness and touristic value. As with *colcha*, current tinsmiths contribute information on the history and practice of this craft. The scholarship on tinwork is influenced by knowledge of the craft, both because Lane Coulter and Maurice Dixon were practicing tinsmiths, as well as the ability to interview living artists for their input on the tradition. Without the annexation of the territory by the US government in 1848, this art form might never have been created. Current tinworkers do not rely on recycled materials as much as their predecessors but the iconography and forms remain the same. Tinwork is uniquely linked to the political and economic histories of New Mexico, and comprises both historical objects to study and a dynamic living tradition that will continue to shape the trajectory of this art practice in the future.



Figure 14: *Nicho* with bulto removed



Figure 16: Detail of bulto head



Figure 15: Bulto from red and green *nicho*



Figure 17: J.M. Apodaca *nicho* (front)



Figure 18: Apodaca *nicho* (back)



Figure 20: Apodaca *nicho* back in side profile



Figure 19 Apodaca *nicho* (back, top detail)



Figure 21: Apodaca *nicho* with statuette



Figure 22: Apodaca *nicho* with statuette detail



Figure 24: Lithograph detail



Figure 23: Apodaca *nicho* with lithograph



Figure 25: Federal style Virgin of Guadalupe *nicho*

CHAPTER 4: MOIFA

The Museum of International Folk Art opened in 1953 and is operated by the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs. The museum houses international folk art from many geographic regions and time periods. The establishment of the collection relied mainly on folk art collectors, including Florence Dibell Bartlett and Alexander Girard. The museum has strong holdings in Hispanic arts due to its location in the state of New Mexico. Since its establishment, MOIFA curated folk art exhibitions using their collection and has had several exhibitions focusing on Hispanic folk art. This chapter discusses how the museum defined and characterized folk art in the past, focusing specifically on exhibitions that included *nichos* and *colcha*. As chapters 2 and 3 established the historical background and cultural histories of these objects in private homes, this chapter will explore their exhibition history and characterization in the museum as folk objects, and how their public display differs from their original contexts. This chapter uses archival materials from MOIFA as its basis to discuss past exhibitions. Through examination of curator's notes, wall texts, object labels, exhibition catalogs, newspaper reviews, press releases, and photographs this chapter will reconstruct what different exhibits "said" about folk art to the viewers.¹⁰⁰ At first the museum's definition of folk art was very narrow, but it broadened over time and now

¹⁰⁰ Not every exhibition had archival photographs, so when display can be discussed it will be, but it is not the case for every show. Similarly, not every archival paper had an attributed author (most pages were typewritten, and some had handwritten annotations), the author will be attributed as the curator even if the specific author is not known. Where possible, photographs of the archival material will be included.

addresses the multiplicity of influences present in *nichos* and *colcha* as well as other folk objects.

The Museum of International Folk Art owes much of its collection and early structure to the Spanish Colonial Arts Society of Santa Fe (SCAS). The term “Spanish Colonial” art appeared in the writings of early 20th-century art collectors as well as in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, a newspaper edited by E. Dana Johnson.¹⁰¹ The term is a bit misleading, as the colonial period in Mexico ended in 1821, and objects made after that date are not “colonial,” but they could reflect legacies of colonialism. In the 1920s and 1930s the society membership consisted primarily of Anglo-American art collectors interested in preserving the traditional arts of Hispanic New Mexico. They established a small market that supported Hispanic artisans and attempted to found an exhibition space, but both ventures halted during the Great Depression (1929-1939) and the society went dormant, with most objects remaining in personal collections.¹⁰² Elizabeth Boyd, an artist from Pennsylvania, led the revitalization of the society. Boyd became interested in New Mexican arts while working for the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration.¹⁰³ Boyd contributed watercolors and research to the Index of American Design, conceived as a record of American arts and crafts to employ artists during the Depression.¹⁰⁴ Boyd became involved with the society in 1952, when she worked at the

¹⁰¹ Marta Weigle, “A Brief History of The Spanish Colonial Arts Society,” *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. II* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁰² Marta Weigle, “A Brief History of The Spanish Colonial Arts Society,” *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. II* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Boyd, interview by Sylvia Loomis, October 8, 1964, transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Boyd, 1964. The Index of American Design is an excellent tool for examining folk art in the 20th century, including what was recorded, when, and by whom. There is a potential avenue

Museum of New Mexico. Boyd, like many contributing artists to the Index, was white. She spearheaded the collection of Hispanic New Mexican art from prior and new members of the Society. The SCAS collection was placed in safekeeping at the newly built Museum of International Folk Art in 1954, who held it until 2001 when SCAS built their own museum.¹⁰⁵ The Spanish Colonial Art Society's collection bolstered MOIFA's fledgling collection and encouraged deeper acquisition in the area of Hispanic New Mexican arts.

The work of the SCAS is an important chronological predecessor to MOIFA, as the collectors cultivated their collections in Santa Fe before the museum was funded by the state government. Notably, the original members of the society were all Anglo Americans who developed an interest in Hispanic arts, without having the traditions as a part of their own cultural heritage. Writing in 1931, one member stated: "we rapidly grew interested in the old and almost disabilitated [*sic*] arts of New Mexico... we came to realize that the capacity for handcraft, of a fine and satisfying quality, though overlaid by a modern American neglect, had not completely disintegrated."¹⁰⁶ Members disagreed about what kind of work they wanted to revive, creating internal dissent. Some believed revival work should be focused on historical traditions, while others welcomed

of research to find out more about the artists themselves, and how they contributed to the narrative of folk art, who they were, and if they were outsiders in the communities or cultures they documented. The Index covered many geographic folk art practices and geographic cultures, from the east to west coast.

¹⁰⁵ Donna Pierce, Marta Weigle, "Appendix A: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection: A History," *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. II* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 96.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Austin, quoted in Marta Weigle. Marta Weigle, "A Brief History of The Spanish Colonial Arts Society," *Spanish New Mexico: The Spanish Colonial Arts Society Collection Vol. II* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1996), 28.

innovation.¹⁰⁷ The society's involvement in the Santa Fe arts market also colored their influence. They supported local artists and traditional arts, but also held sway in the forms the art took and directly collected from the artists they supported, creating a semi-closed loop of artistic production in a market setting. Their cultural values influenced which objects they admired: people and cultural style markers change (hence the internal debate about what counted as "quality" and "handcraft"). Although collectors did not modify older, 19th-century artworks, they set a precedent for how the art market and collecting process went hand-in-hand in Santa Fe in the 20th century. Patrons could influence artistic outcomes, thereby creating standards for art objects while being cultural outsiders.

After the opening of MOIFA in 1954, the attitudes of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society shaped early exhibitions. E. Boyd worked with both the SCAS and MOIFA in the 1950s and 1960s. Her subject knowledge on the field of Hispanic arts led her to curate a show at MOIFA in 1959 titled *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*. She wrote the exhibition catalog, and it is an excellent resource to examine the early curatorial characterization of Hispanic folk objects. This show displayed all types of Hispanic folk art objects including furniture, textiles, metalwork, *santos*, and more. Boyd, through her Works Progress Administration and Museum of New Mexico employment, and position as president of SCAS was an expert in the field at the time. In 1959, she was the definitive academic and curatorial authority on this subject. The objects in this show

¹⁰⁷ William Wroth, "The Hispanic Craft Revival in New Mexico," in Janet Kardon, ed., *Revivals! Diverse Traditions: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft, 1920-1945* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 86.

formed the basis of her case studies in her 1975 book *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico*, which is a seminal text on the subject, and referenced by most subsequent books in the field. In academic writing, Boyd established the genre of Hispanic folk art which was known and understood as a style in New Mexico but was not widely recognized elsewhere. Between the book and the exhibition at the museum, Boyd helped distinguish New Mexican folk art as a genre unto itself.

The curatorial record of the exhibit *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico* is mostly limited to Boyd's exhibition catalog. The exhibition presented functional objects found in New Mexican homes from the 18th and 19th centuries. The cover image of the book is a *colcha* blanket, stitched in different colored squares to emulate quilt blocks. Boyd justifies the use of the term "colonial" for art objects when she states "Mexican rule, although politically separated from Spain, made so little change in New Mexican life that it is hardly worthwhile to classify frontier folk art created between 1821 and 1846 by any name other than 'colonial.'"¹⁰⁸ Boyd selects the dominant culture of the territory as the most influential, without qualifying the influence from Indigenous or Anglo people. In the section on textiles, Boyd writes: "weaving was practiced all over New Mexico by necessity until factory-made goods became available, when it died out except in a few of the more remote mountainous areas to the north."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico* exhibition catalog (Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art, 1959), 40.

¹⁰⁹ Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, 17.

As explained in chapter 2, sheep's wool fulfilled the textile needs of settlers in New Spain until the introduction of other trade goods. As to the development of loom weaving, Boyd says: country made [looms] were large and clumsy."¹¹⁰ Boyd focuses on horizontal treadle looms built by Spanish colonists, with disregard to upright looms used in Indigenous (Navajo and Pueblo) weaving traditions.¹¹¹ Boyd does little to elaborate on her statement about the quality of the looms and focuses more on the objects they produced. Later in the catalog, Boyd refers to the history of the *colcha* stitch as "a mystery," and presents the idea that "If the designs were taken from... Mexican and Chinese altar cloths of the period, their transference into wool yarns may have inspired the cross-tack stitch."¹¹² The existence of textiles (artifacts) proves the existence of looms even if there is little primary source material to judge the built quality of the looms themselves. She does not put forward her own theory about the genesis of the *colcha* stitch. Her art history training in western, Eurocentric art focuses her analysis on the object itself, rather than expanding to consider the difficult path colonists had to build looms and create textiles in a new culture far removed from old world Spain.

Boyd proposes a period of decline in Hispanic arts in the 19th century. The changes wrought by the arrival of the railroad are, in her opinion, negative and engendered poor quality art objects. Her disapproval centers on the commercial goods that arrived via train, namely house paints and commercially dyed thread. She calls their

¹¹⁰ E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico* exhibition catalog (Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art, 1959), 17.

¹¹¹ "Navajo Weaving Methods," Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, accessed April 15, 2022. <https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/online-exhibit/19-century-navajo-weaving-asm/navajo-weaving-methods>.

¹¹² Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, 19.

arrival “the Waterloo of native folk arts,” this metaphor implying that tradition is a battle that was lost in the late 19th century.¹¹³ She describes painted tinwork, as “smeared over the surface,” as opposed to tinwork embellished with wallpaper, tin punches, and lithographs.¹¹⁴ Similarly, she states textiles “went through a cycle of beauty and decline.”¹¹⁵ Boyd preferred the aesthetic of early *colcha*, and its handspun, vegetable dyed yarn. Commercial dyes created opportunities for greater color variety but resulted in *colcha* with “busy designs” and “unhappy results.”¹¹⁶ The postscript of the exhibition catalog reads “Any culture pattern will disintegrate when another is superimposed upon it by newcomers with different languages, religious practices, values, and standards of behavior... the new culture, especially when it dominates the economy, supplants the old.”¹¹⁷ Her writing in the catalog espouses the view that pure tradition is best and change in folk art due to economic patterns is negative and pollutes tradition. Neither this catalog nor her 1974 book acknowledge how surprising and fortunate it is that Hispanic folk art and traditional skills continued without vanishing during the onset of American political rule and Anglo culture seeping into the territory. Both *nichos* and *colcha* changed markedly but valuing older objects more than newer objects dismisses the economic, political, and geographic change Hispanic culture in New Mexico weathered in the second half of the 20th century. Societal changes can be tracked through objects

¹¹³ Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, exhibition catalog (Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art, 1959), 42.

¹¹⁴ Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, 42.

¹¹⁵ Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, 44.

¹¹⁶ Boyd, *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico*, 44.

¹¹⁷ E. Boyd, “Postscript,” *Popular Arts of Colonial New Mexico* exhibition catalog (Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art, 1959)

viewed as artifacts, and these objects are a testament to the capacity of folk art and the Hispanic people of the New Mexico territory to evolve through economic and environmental changes.

Boyd's perspective shaped another exhibition in 1963 with similarly narrow ideas about the definition of folk art. *The Idea of Folk Art* show is lightly represented in the archive, with no photographs and a small paper trail. The largest piece of archival evidence is the exhibition catalog for this show, also written by Boyd. The show presented the collection of Florence Dibell Bartlett, the founder of MOIFA. Although it is unclear if Bartlett had a hand in the exhibition planning, the show espoused the idea that advancing industrialization imperiled traditional folk art. The catalog uses large headers to make statements and smaller print paragraphs to explain them. The booklet tells the reader that "folk art is traditional, rural, useful, and universal." These four adjectives accompany explanatory text. There are no photographs of this show in the archives, but perhaps the exhibition replicated the four categories in the catalog as wall text and thematic organizers. These four adjectives reveal a narrow view of folk art, which in 1963 relied heavily on its ethnographic and anthropological roots.

The idea that folk art is traditional is an old one. It links folk art to its anthropological roots, when anthropologists saw art as a way of comprehending culture.¹¹⁸ These objects, to the anthropologists, symbolized "pure" traditions of a time before colonizer interaction. This perspective is warped by the bias of the people who

¹¹⁸ Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter," *Art As Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 3.

made contact, willingly or unwillingly, with the groups. Cultural perspective is a huge determinant in the reception and analysis of folk art. In order to understand an object, the researcher must understand some cultural perspective, and attempt to ensure their own biases do not sway their analysis. Researchers can study other belief systems to augment their own cultural perspective. Objects provide evidence for wide ranging aspects of culture, making their study more diverse than art that might reflect only elite aspects of a culture (although the definitions of art are always expanding). Furthermore, this idea that folk art is traditional plays into the idea that it is always rural and useful. It plays into the romantic notion that groups making folk art are far removed from modern society and rely on the land and geography around them for their needs. Likewise, objects made in rural spaces must be functional to be important, because the owners cannot access other goods.¹¹⁹ Some narratives of tradition project a narrow, Eurocentric view onto folk art as consigned to the periphery, away from urban society, and out of time, where they cannot evolve or change their ideas within their own societies. It is, in the words of material culture historian Jules David Prown, “delusion to assume we can acquire complete access to the belief system of a culture through its material survival.”¹²⁰ No one can know everything about a culture through its objects, so by saying they are traditional and therefore must be rural and useful reveals more about the interpreting society’s views of traditionalism than the society that is being studied.

¹¹⁹ Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

¹²⁰ Jules Prown, “Mind in Matter,” *Art As Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

The museum witnessed a new era in the categorization of folk art with the 1973-1976 installation *What Is Folk Art?* This show speaks directly to the prior characterization of folk art in *The Idea of Folk Art* and introduces opposing ideas, creating a dialogue between the museum's past definition of folk art and an emerging new definition. The large archival record of this show traces its development through wall texts and label drafts, curatorial notes, press releases, and print materials. The curatorial notes discuss the diversity of folk art through several categories: environment, production, purpose, content, folk aesthetic, variation, and change. The curators' many notes and revisions on categorization demonstrate a commitment to show the diverse forms of folk art. The opening panel of wall text invites the viewer to question the usual descriptions of folk artists as "untrained, lacking in skills... tradition-bound" and writes that the "aim of this exhibit is to invite the viewer to ponder over these stereotyped notions, to show that questions may generate conflicting answers, and to emphasize that a neat, compact definition of folk art is not easy to achieve, involving as it does two distinct factors: the producer (folk) and the product (art)."¹²¹ At the very beginning of the exhibition, curators point out the active role producers had in creating folk art. The objects did not appear, divorced from their maker or society; rather they are a product of their environment. This is a step beyond the analysis of E. Boyd, who limited her perspective to readings of the objects alone, rather than their cultural context.

¹²¹ Typed notes "label text" by Yvonne Lange, September 1976, Label Text NM Folk Art Exhibition, Bartlett Library, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM.

Several of the grounding questions of the exhibition are in direct conversation with the *The Idea of Folk Art*. Six central questions anchored the thematic sections of the show: Is folk art always rural in origin? Is the folk artist untrained? Is folk art always utilitarian? Is folk art always simple? Is folk art always traditional? Is folk art universal? The exhibition presented its argument as the viewer traveled through the display and encountered each question on a wall text or label, alongside an object that provided context. The curators intended to probe the historical idea that folk art is narrow and only has a few expressions. Folk art is a product of a culture and therefore varies greatly. The annotated notes show those who developed the exhibition evolved ideas over several drafts of object groups and subtopics. In a heading under production, the typed note reads: “conservative but innovative too (use of new materials as fast as they are invented.)” and a handwritten annotation reads “modern technology, too.” The curators whittled down a long list of techniques and tools to weaving, basketry, pottery, woodworking, and metalworks, cutting out quilting, glassblowing, and sandcasting. This selection process appeared in handwritten notes. Content is another section that evolved several times, with the base question: “Are folk objects always simple?”¹²² Someone brings up the point of religion, and how religious symbolism is sophisticated so those in the religious group understand it, but those outside the group might not. Just because people outside the group, like white colonial settlers, did not understand all the symbolism on religious and secular objects in New Mexico, does not mean they do not

¹²² What Is Folk Art notes, September 1976, Label Text NM Folk Art Exhibition, Bartlett Library, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM.

have significance. This is a manifestation of the material culture tenet of inherent and attached value: outsiders value objects based on material worth, typically derived from their materials if they do not understand the form, function, or narrative of the object. Those within the society understand the attached value of the object, be it iconic or traditional value. When societies lose that association, an inherent part of the object is lost and they are in danger of being considered disposable. Content cannot, or is not meant to be, understood by an outsider in every situation so outsiders must rely on the information provided by the museum to contextualize it.

In the section on “Is the Folk Artist untrained?” the curators present many different art forms that use different tactile materials: basketry, weaving, woodworking, and metalworking. They point out that depending on the materials the art form requires, the process of running that equipment ranges from the simple to the intricate. They write that “All crafts demand skill acquired only with training which need not be formal.” Just because folk artists did not attend an art academy or art training that follows the Western perspective of what art should be does not mean they are unskilled artists, simply that their skills lie in artistry the artistic elite traditionally looked down upon. The curators turn the judgment of skill back onto the viewer by asking: “can YOU handle the tools and techniques of basketry, weaving, woodworking, metalworking, or pottery?”¹²³ which is a rather humorous way to call the viewer to assess their own skill, rather than judging others. The skill section of the exhibition included New Mexican tinwork, although it is

¹²³ What Is Folk Art notes, September 1976, Label Text NM Folk Art Exhibition, Bartlett Library, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM.

unknown which ones. The exhibition labels likely discussed the use of tin as a new material that metalsmiths incorporated into their repertoires and the skill required to manipulate metal through cutting, punching, marking, and soldering to build shapes and dimension.

This exhibit came about during the genesis of material culture as an academic field of inquiry, and several of the core ideas of the exhibit are grounded in the developing methodology of material culture. This exhibition promotes material culture through the display of art objects as artifacts of culture. A wide range of cultures were represented in this show, illustrating the fact that art comes in a wide variety of forms and expressions, but the art world is inherently shaped by the western perspective of progress and hierarchy. This show urges viewers to break away from an object's value stemming from its beauty, skill, or material worth. Objects encapsulate entire cultures in their expression. The curators seek to prove that folk art is universal. They qualify their statement by acknowledging that folk art is regional in expression, but universal in theme rather than aesthetic or skill. This exhibition addresses the impact technology, trade, and cultural change had on folk art, which is a more holistic view than previous shows at MOIFA. The exhibition ended with the concession that there is no one perfect definition of folk art, and asked visitors three questions: "Who are the folk? What is art? What is folk art?"¹²⁴ and asked visitors to drop their responses in a box. It is unknown what the

¹²⁴ Typed notes "label text" by Yvonne Lange, September 1976, Label Text NM Folk Art Exhibition, Bartlett Library, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM.

museum did with the responses, but that would be an excellent addendum to research on the museum to see how the public reacted to the exhibition.

The 1976 closure of *What is Folk Art?* was followed by the exhibition *Dias de Más, Dias de Menos*. This show was MOIFA's unique Bicentennial exhibition, which many museums across the country participated in. Bicentennial exhibitions are interesting capsules of museum history: many museums had them and they each chose different ways to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the United States. In 1976, New Mexico had been part of the union for 64 years, but the museum nevertheless took the opportunity to celebrate the country's 200th birthday. The purpose of the exhibit was "to explore the exciting society of the Spanish in New Mexico. These people, who were indeed America's earliest colonists, created a regional identity which is still evident in the architecture, ornamentation, design and content of much of present day Spanish New Mexican art."¹²⁵ The National Endowment for the Arts funded the installation, as it likely funded many bicentennial exhibitions that celebrated and probed the idea of patriotism and American history. This exhibition combined many Hispanic folk art objects into one show, with the unifier being their geographic origin, rather than material category. For this reason, this show included several objects this thesis discussed in previous chapters, including the altar cloth *colcha* and several tinwork *nichos*. This show combined Spanish language sayings called *dichos* with the different types of artwork as an example of how language changes and evolves (and perhaps how significant Spanish was and is in the

¹²⁵ Typed notes, "Exhibition Collection," April 24, 1995, Dias de Menos folder, Bartlett Library, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, NM.

United States). The textile *dicho* read *Unos cardan la lana y otros agarran la fama* (some card the wool, others get the fame) and was situated on the gallery wall above a display of textiles.¹²⁶ Language, unlike material culture, does not rely upon a museum for preservation and is passed orally through generations.

A few exhibition photographs exist from this show, allowing a glimpse of the display methods used. The photos are in black and white, but most objects are identifiable by shape if not completely distinct. Tinwork is grouped together, with *nichos* displayed alongside mirrors and candle sconces. The gallery has built in display cabinets and all labels are displayed at hip height perpendicular to the wall. *Nichos* are also displayed on short plinths on a mounted display, on which they float in space rather than being attached to a wall. The gallery view of the objects arranged one next to the other is an efficient display method, and allows viewers to look at multiple examples of tinwork within one field of vision. However, it cannot replicate the original display circumstances of *nichos* even if this exhibition focuses on Spanish life in New Mexico. The exhibition chose a formal gallery display, rather than creating a diorama of a Spanish house in New Mexico to show the objects in their household settings. Objects convey many aspects of lifestyle and culture but the way they are used in space is often obscured in a museum context. Bicentennial exhibitions reveal how museum's chose to characterize the American past, and in the case of MOIFA in 1976 they celebrated the state's specific Hispanic heritage.

¹²⁶ The original text in Spanish and the English translation were provided by the museum in a printed handout on the exhibition.

Display impacts the perception of art objects. Although few archival photos exist, most of the historic exhibitions discussed likely relied on a traditional museum presentation. Objects hung on walls, or in glass cases or cabinets alongside labels and explanatory text. They are on display, easy to approach and examine, but they are also frozen in a public setting, away from their original context. When museums collect objects, their original function ceases, because the object is no longer part of its community or culture and is no longer living- it neither serves a purpose nor participates in cultural actions. *Nichos* and *colcha* are excellent examples of this: in situ they are household objects, meant to be interacted with daily. *Colcha* blankets show wear and tear, likely from daily usage of rubbing against other garments or textiles. Some *nichos* still reveal traces of human modification, like dried roses and added photographs. *Nichos* have a tactile and kinectic element museum display cannot do justice: in homes, many *nichos* stored candles which the owners lit (evidenced by the number of *nichos* with candleholders inside and outside the main niche). With lit candles, light would shine and flicker off the tin surface, and wax would drip, creating a mark of candle usage. Museums do not abide by open flames indoors for many safety reasons, so now *nichos* rely on electric light from gallery ceilings, rather than the way they would have been used in the 19th century. Values that have been attached to an object by its original makers are hard to represent in a gallery because values are abstract ideas. Museums ascribe their own values to objects as things to be examined and studied, but do not always excel at representing the lived experiences of objects. Due to the safety and conservation restrictions many objects have special display rules but perhaps in the future MOIFA will

consider expanding in this direction and acknowledging the histories of objects before they came into the museum.

The building of the Hispanic Heritage Wing in 1989, created a permanent residence for objects included in *Dias de Más*, *Dias de Menos* and more.¹²⁷ The change over time in the museum's exhibitions demonstrate evolving views on folk art, and how much can truly be included. The influence of the Spanish Colonial Art Society at the beginning of the century marked what objects were considered fashionable, when they were previously privately owned and functional items. The museum's collection owes a debt to early collectors, but the initial Spanish folk art collection was influenced by SCAS's idea they were "preserving" what fulfilled their idea of Spanish folk arts. Folk art is a living tradition, as the previous two chapters demonstrated, and the museum went on to continue to collect tinwork and *colcha* throughout the 20th century to recognize these traditions are living traditions. From a material culture standpoint, object analysis and museum historiography go hand in hand because museums reflect a societal response via the objects in their collection. They are sites of interpretation that reveal information both about the society of origin and of the museum's society if the responses are interpreted. The written record of past exhibitions allows for examination of previous responses, because the object in the collection remained in their care, but the museum response changed from its opening to present.

¹²⁷ "Hispanic Heritage Wing," Museum of International Folk Art, accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.internationalfolkart.org/about/our-history/hispanic-heritage-wing.html>.

The museum's collection today displays art of Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania. The current definition of folk art accessible on the museum website is very long and attempts to encompass some of the contradictions present in folk art practice: decorative/utilitarian, everyday/ceremonial, handmade/synthetic/recycled components, private/public, formal/informal learning, and more. The last part of the definition reads: "It is recognized that, as traditions are dynamic, traditional folk art may change over time and may include innovations in tradition. Is of, by, and for the people; all people, inclusive of class, status, culture, community, ethnicity, gender, and religion."¹²⁸ The museum has come a long way in its definition of folk art, and it will likely continue to evolve as the museum navigates its place among the influences of the art world, artists, academics, curators, and cultural attitudes toward folk objects.

¹²⁸ "What Is Folk Art?" Museum of International Folk Art, accessed April 15, 2022. <https://www.internationalfolkart.org/learn/what-is-folk-art.html>.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis began and ended with inquiries about land. The land that is now New Mexico is the setting for all the things this research discusses: livestock, natural resources, landscape, space, real and imagined boundaries. The New Mexican people survived a governmental change that upended their language, their citizenship rights, their land claims, and their culture. However, they preserved many parts of their Mexican heritage especially through the practice of folk art. The movements of everyday life are the places where change is small: household objects like shrines and textiles are not the first place an art history might look for signs of cultural change. Using a material culture methodology reveals that these objects are witnesses to a historic period and serve as evidence for changing traditions in the period between annexation and statehood. This thesis explains the macrocosm of culture through the microcosm of objects. Chapter 2 discussed how sheep breeding practices, trade routes, and the expanding economy of trade objects impacted a regional textile tradition. Although prior curators considered the change in 19th-century *colcha* to be negative, their analysis does not encompass the societal change this art form survived. The railroad's impact on the economy, and by extension, the arts of New Mexico cannot be overstated. Chapter 3 delved into the development and aesthetics of tin *nichos*, which would not exist without the occupation of the US Army in the 1840's and the arrival of trade goods in tin cans. The very existence of *nichos* demonstrates the dynamic power of folk traditions and how they absorb and encompass change in their culture.

The Museum of International Folk Art is a crucial site of part of this research. Chapter 4 considered how MOIFA shaped the interpretation of folk art through their exhibitions and academic texts. From 1953 to the 1990s the museum's characterization of folk art broadened to include acknowledgement of cultural factors on folk objects. As an institution, it holds and preserves historical objects. It displays them so patrons can visit and enjoy them. If the museum did not have these objects, they would be much harder to access in private homes or collections, or maybe lost to time. The museum shapes the general public's knowledge about its objects because most visitors do not have more information than the museum presents them. The museum's task is therefore twofold: disseminate information and display objects. The museum currently operates with a very diverse definition of folk art and works within the framework that culture defines art, and many cultures create many different forms of art. MOIFA will continue to shape perspectives on folk art for the general public and steward their collection for continued scholarly discovery.

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