1. Background

High in the arid and rocky mountains of northern Guerrero in the south of Mexico, the 6,200 Nahua villagers of Tlamacazapa earn a meager living by weaving palm baskets, an ancient art form preserved over centuries. Boys gather the palm which grows wild and carry it home. A skilled weaver, working steadily, can make a large basket in three or four days. Men and boys sell their baskets for a few pesos on the streets throughout Mexico.

The Nahua proudly call themselves “people of corn.” Corn is their main food and in Tlamacazapa, families farm or buy corn and cook on a large comal over a tlecuil, an open three-stone fire. Most families eat twice a day. People gather firewood in the surrounding forests, carrying heavy loads of wood strapped to their backs. The villagers have serious problems with sanitation and with the quantity, quality and economy of their water. Laboratory studies reveal toxic metals like lead and arsenic in their water, soil, chemical palm dyes and glazed clay cooking pots. Especially among malnourished people, this long-term exposure to low levels of harmful metals causes a toxic synergy, producing a silent crisis of slow poisoning and poor health. Today, village women of all ages are gradually re-weaving their suffering into lives of greater substance by nurturing their creativity and resilience – two vital characteristics of a transformed life.

2. Project Objectives

The objectives of this art project are to:

1. Sensitively capture the complex lives of Indigenous women and their families who live in acute poverty in one large rural Mexican village and the means for social development through art work done by two artists (one Canadian, one Mexican) and ten palm weavers.
2. Create opportunities for ten participating village women to engage in reflective processes about their lives, their work and their hopes, helping them to place increased value on their own work and on themselves and to gain strength to take social actions on their own behalf.
3. Organize a touring exhibition of the paintings/ prints and woven baskets in Mexico and in Canada as a means for increased public education and support towards the betterment of life for villagers.

This exhibition is a continuation of two previous exhibitions organized by Atzin that toured in Mexico and Canada. The first, "Reweaving a Life," was an exhibition of art and palm that focused on the context of Tlamacazapa and toured in both Mexico and Canada (2006-2008). The second, "Tlamacazapa: Weavers of Life" was a photographic exhibition that captured the work and lives of women weavers, by Rodrigo Cruz and Rufina Fermín Procopio (2010-2013), and toured in Mexico.

3. Coordinating Organizations
ATZIN DESARROLLO COMUNITARIO, A.C.
Atzin Desarrollo Comunitario, A.C. (Cuernavaca, México) is a humanitarian, non-profit based in Cuernavaca, Morelos, working closely with a sister organization, Atzin Canada, in Ottawa. Since 1997, Atzin has responded to the needs of the Tlamacazapa community in Guerrero by gradually establishing programs in four integrated sectors: Health and healing; Income generation for women; Community education and literacy; and Environment, water and sanitation.
Contact: Dr. Susan Smith, Director, Atzin in Mexico. Telephone: (52) (777) 310-5577 or (587) 832 2383. Email: atzinmexico@prodigy.net.mx and atzincanada@gmail.com
www.atzin.org

YOTLAKAT NON SIWATL A.C.
Yotlakat Non Siwatl (YNS, A Women Reborn) is an organization of women of Tlamacazapa, Guerrero, constituted in 2007. YNS receives technical and administrative assistance from Atzin Desarrollo Comunitario to develop and implement coordinated community development programs in Tlamacazapa.
Contact: Xóchitl Ramírez Velasco, President. Telephone (52) (777) 310-5577. Email: yotlakatnonsiwatl@yahoo.com.mx

4. Project Description

The "We are your Future" art exhibition portrays the daily reality of basket weavers who live in acute poverty, caught in a complex web of social disintegration coupled with environmental toxicity and water shortage. Today, these Indigenous women are re-creating a sense of worth and identity through a re-weaving of their perceptions of themselves and of their strengths.

More than 50 high quality palm weavings accompany 25 original paintings and prints, done by two artists, a Mexican and a Canadian, to be exhibited publicly in both Mexico and Canada. Each artist captured different dimensions of village life and illustrated the essence of development with dignity. This allows visitors to the exhibition the opportunity to reflect on the artistic interpretations of the village context as well as the work undertaken for positive social change.

Phase I Mexico (2013-2016)

The two artists, Alejandro Aranda (Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico) and Ray Dirks (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada) travelled to Tlamacazapa, Guerrero where they spent time in the village, meeting with the women, touring the village and gathering materials (photographs, sketches, interviews.) in preparation for their art work. Artists and weavers worked closely together in Mexico from December 1st - 9th 2-13 and then returned to their respective homes to complete their art in paint or in palm for the exhibition.

The weavers prepared for the artists’ visits by participating in several reflection circles prior to the artists’ arrival. The weavers discussed positive changes in their lives and identified critical elements of these changes – the “what, how, why and meaning” of these changes – and later shared these elements with the artists.

During 2015-6 the exhibition opened in three galleries in Mexico, each time for at least six weeks: William Spratling Museum in Taxco, Guerrero; Fuerte de San Diego Museum in Acapulco, Guerrero; and Casona Spencer in Cuernavaca, Morelos. One additional location in Mexico City will host the exhibition in 2016.
Atzin was, and continues to be, responsible for logistics related to transportation, food and accommodation arrangements as well as for translation, proposal writing, funding obtainment, exhibit planning and organization of participant weavers. The Proequity Program of the National Institute of women (INMUJERES) in Mexico City funded the production of the exhibition as well as a bilingual (English-Spanish) documentary book entitled *Iguatlanesti Here comes the dawn/ Ya viene el amanecer* (ISBN 978-0-9877177-2-6; 55 pages, of which 29 are colour prints of the art or village photographs.)

**Phase II Canada (2016-2017)**

Phase II of the project includes at least three exhibitions of the art work in Canada (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Belleville, and possibly Ottawa/ Montreal). The schedule of the exhibitions is determined by Atzin in consultation with project partners in Canada.

Selected participating women weavers attended the openings of the exhibition in Mexico, and also participated in media and public presentations about Tlamacazapa and their work. Hopefully, several will attend in each location in Canada along with the artists. Financial support for participation of artists, weavers and coordinators at the exhibitions will be dependent on funding obtained for Phase II.

5. **Artist Biographies**

**Etching Print Artist**

**Alejandro Aranda**, a Mexican artist, etches a mix of forceful messages, traditions and fanciful myth into unique prints, renown for their fine detail and captivating imagery. Constantly evolving in technique and content, Aranda is revitalizing this art form as a rich expression of tradition and present day reality, often depicting the hidden, deeper Mexico as well as the simple beauty of a hand knotted shawl draped over a shoulder or a small child running with a paper kite. Firmly believing that art must be rooted in cultural and social purpose, Aranda’s work has been in solidarity with the most important social movements in the country since 1975. Much of his art, now spread throughout Mexico, is indeed a rich expression of our common search for dignified lives characterized by peace, security and justice. Having spent his childhood in the Tierra Caliente region of Guerrero, Aranda now lives in Morelos.

**Watercolour Artist**

**Ray Dirks** is a Canadian artist whose paintings tell stories about our global family. As a painter, photographer, gallery curator and world traveller, his watercolours portray extraordinary images of ordinary people going about their daily lives. A master of his art, Dirks captures their dignity, youthfulness and humble courage while showing us the small details of their life circumstances. His artwork reflects his personal commitment to the colourful creation of hope, cultural bridges and peacemaking, and reminds us to do the same. Largely self-taught, Dirks has received numerous art awards and grants. Since 1998, he has been the Director, Curator and Resident Artist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Dirks’ solo, joint and curated exhibitions, featuring art from more than 30 countries, have toured internationally.

**Featured Palm Weaving Artist**

**Rufina Fermin Procopio** earns her living by weaving intricate palm baskets. Having learned this art as a child by watching her mother work, Rufina is now a master weaver. She is skilled in the techniques of weaving and can creatively translate activities from everyday life into palm figures of unique design. Her small figures of *Meztli* on display illustrate many of the responsibilities of women in Tlamacazapa today. *Meztli* collects palm and firewood, fetches water; cares for her child; weaves a basket; prepares food; and teaches children. Rufina knows the daily struggle of poverty all too well, and steadfastly holds on to her dreams for the future, always gaining from challenging new experiences, “I want to learn, and to share that knowledge with my son and with others.” Rufina lives in Tlamacazapa, Guerrero.
6. Exhibition Components

- 25 framed works of art.
- 50+ high quality baskets of many sizes and shapes, including seven scenes of multiple woven figures of women undertaking different activities. (The number of baskets included in the exhibition is adjusted depending on the actual amount of gallery space available.)
- Audio narration of village women’s stories of transformation (18 minutes, looping).
- Tombstone labels for each work of art and palm scenes.
- Mounted posters with text about Tlamacazapa; Atzin; People of Palm; artist biographies; social transformation (all bilingual English-Spanish).
- Printed brochure (English-Spanish); printed and electronic invitations.
- Weaving demonstrations by weavers of Tlamacazapa during inauguration and public presentation (see video links below).

7. Examples of publicity and publications about the exhibition


Casona Spencer, Cuernavaca, México – Television Azteca
https://www.facebook.com/aztecamorelosoficial/videos/915017345220463/?pnref=story

Fuerte de San Diego, Acapulco, Mexico
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=956648447710033&id=55321828053699

Invitation with specifics of Mexico location printed on reverse side.
8. Art

Art by Ray Dirks for the “We are your future” exhibition. All in brown wood frames.

**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** beauty in soul and craft 1  
la belleza en el alma y la artesanía 1  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 33 x 49cm

**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** beauty in soul and craft 2  
la belleza en el alma y la artesanía 2  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 33.3 x 49cm
Artist: Ray Dirks
Title: at the Taxco bus station
En la estación de autobuses de Taxco
Technique: watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014
Measurements: 33.3 x 47cm

Artist: Ray Dirks
Title: beautiful Tlamacazapa hermosa Tlamacazapa
Technique: watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014
Measurements: 23 x 50.7cm
**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** Bonifacia  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 23 x 50.9cm

**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** water work  
**El trabajo del agua**  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 19 x 50.9cm
**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** a mother’s home work  
El trabajo del hogar de una madre  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 23 x 50.9cm

**Artist:** Ray Dirks  
**Title:** courage, peace, strength to you, from apprehension to joy - the future in fifteen unfinished portraits  
El valor, la paz, la fuerza a usted, de aprehensión al gozo – el futuro en quince retratos inacabadas  
**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink, metallic acrylic edging, 2014  
**Measurements:** 290 x 35cm
**Artist:** Ray Dirks

**Title:** Strength for the journey (1-6) Six portraits
Fuerza para el camino (1-6) Seis retratos

**Technique:** watercolor, archival ink,
metallic acrylic edging, 2014

**Measurements:** 127 x 36cm
Art by Alejandro Aranda for the “We are your future” exhibition. All in brown wood frames.

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Palm Leaf
Hoja de palma / 2014
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 23 x 20.5 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Constellation
Constelación / 2014
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 44.5 x 26.5 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Everyday
Cotidianidad / 2014
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 44 x 26 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Autumn
Otoño / 2014
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 44.5 x 29 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Sacred Water
Agua sagrada / 2014
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 45.5 x 29 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: I am your future
Soy su futuro / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 44 x 25 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda  
Título: The Search/ 
La busqueda / 2015  
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta  
Medida: 44.5 x 29.5 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda  
Título: Lullaby of the Moon  
Arrullo de luna / 2015  
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta  
Medida: 47 x 39.5 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Tonantzin / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 29 x 21.5 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: The Teaching/
La enseñanza / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: Diametro 22 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: The Wait
La espera / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: Diametro 22 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Weaving is our Life
Tejer es nuestra vida / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 60 x 42.5 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Woman of Palm Nesting Hope
Mujer de palma anidando esperanza / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 60 x 43 cm
Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: When the Sabino dies, we die
Cuando el sabino muere, nosotros morimos / 2006
Técnica: Linograbado
Medida: 52.5 x 41 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: The Shawl
El rebozo / 2006
Técnica: Linograbado
Medida: 51 x 41 cm
Missing photos of art

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: Tehuantiatemiki, we dream
Tehuantiatemiki, nosotras soñamos / 2015
Técnica: Aguafuerte - aguatinta
Medida: 44.5 x 26.5 cm

Autor: Alejandro Aranda
Título: The Weavers
Los Tejedores/ 2006
Técnica: Linograbado
Medida: 52 x 41 cm