

Living

living@thenews.com.mx

HONORING MEXICO'S TREASURES

The National Fund for the Promotion of Handicrafts, or Fonart, supports the nation's 'artesanos' by convening national contests and promoting their art internationally. The fund also works to improve their lives and preserve the popular arts, considered 'icons' of Mexican culture.

TEXT AND PHOTOS JIM JOHNSTON • SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Mexico's craftspeople, our unsung heroes, have one day to celebrate. Mostly working in small rural communities, Mexico's "artesanos," or craftspeople, are recognized each year with the Concurso Nacional Gran Premio de Arte Popular (National Competition Grand Prize of Popular Art), the most prestigious event of its kind in the country.

When Modesta Lavana Pérez, 79, accepted the Presidential Prize for Artesanías at the Palacio de Iturbide in Mexico City on October 16, she spoke her words of thanks first in Náhuatl, then in Spanish.

Wrapped in her award-winning, hand-woven woolen shawl, her short figure barely visible over the podium, she impressed the crowd of elegantly dressed capitalinos with her quiet dignity.

Although few understood her words in Náhuatl, it was a clear reminder of the deep roots of Mexican culture manifested by this competition.

Among the prize winners were representatives of 24 different ethnic groups, including Tzotzil, Nahua, Purépecha, Chontal, and Tzeltal, from all 31 states of the republic.

More than 1,600 artists com-

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DEB HALL

Owner, indigenous art galleries in San Miguel de Allende and Pátzcuaro

peted this year, and 115 awards were given, totaling 1,680,000 pesos in prize money.

The event coincided with the fifth Concurso Nacional Grandes Obras Maestras de Arte Popular Leyendas Vivientes (National Competition of Great Works of Popular Art by Living Legends), which awarded 455,000 more pesos to 16 prize winners.

The competing categories included artworks in ceramics, weaving, basketry, feather art, metal and wood work, lacquer ware and musical instruments.

Pascuala Díaz Lopes, 30, from Michoacán, stood by her prize-winning huipil, looking nervous but proud.

Spectators and press photographers crowded around, dazzled by the color and intricacy of her weaving. It was her first time in Mexico City.

When asked questions about her work, she shyly turned to a friend, who helped translate her answers into Spanish.

At 87, Isaac Ramos Padilla, a "rebozo" (shawl) maker from Malinalco, is the oldest Living Legend to be honored this year.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FONART

Above, rebozo by Hemilio López Left, jug by José Tomás Esparza

FONART'S MISSION

Since 1974, Fonart, a nonprofit government agency under the auspice of the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social has worked to develop the social, artistic and economic aspects of the lives of Mexico's artisans.

The mission of Fonart is to preserve the values of traditional culture, improve the lives of artisans, link the creativity of the artists to the consumer through educational programs, national contests and international promotions.

Deb Hall and her husband Rick operate two of the best indigenous galleries in Mexico, in San Miguel de Allende and Pátzcuaro, where they represent several of the artists in this year's competition. Deb Hall's blog must-read for anyone interested in

"He's very quiet about it," said his daughter, "but the queen Spain owns one of his rebozos!"

"The popular arts are the core of our culture. They offer a personal touch missing in much of the modern world, and Mexican artesanías are uniquely defining elements of our culture," said Rafaela Luft Dávalos, general director of Fonart, El Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (National Fund for the Promotion of Handicrafts).



Some of the winners are shown here.



Huipil by Pascuala Díaz



Wool dress by Modesta Lavana

traditional arts of Mexico (www.zocalo-demexicanfolkart.blogspot.com/).

When asked what relevance Mexico's popular arts have in today's world, she said, "With the recent [Diego] Rivera and [Frida] Kahlo blockbuster exhibitions, plus the upcoming 2010 bicentennial events, Mexico is fondly looking back at her past, and folk art is an important part of that nostalgia."

"Folk art is a welcome, if not necessary, antidote to this mass-produced material world in which we live today. Original, joyous, naive and soulful are not adjectives associated with any machine-made item."

This year's competition was supported by the Fomento Cultural Banamex, as well as the Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú A.C., and the Fundación Pedro y Elena Hernández A.C.

MORE INFO

If you're searching for typical quality artesanías, try looking at these stores.

The prize-winning pieces from this year's competition will be on display (and for sale) in Mexico City at the following Fonart store locations:

FONART STORES

- Av. Patriotismo 691 Col. Mixcoac
- Av. Juárez 89 Col. Centro
- Av. Paseo de la Reforma 116 Col. Juárez

Smaller Fonart stores are also located in the **Palacio Nacional** and at the **airport** (Terminal 2). There are branch stores throughout Mexico, as well as in the United States, France, Spain and coming soon to Tokyo.

For more information: <http://www.fonart.gob.mx>

ZÓCALO GALLERIES

- Rick and Deb Hall's galleries, called Zócalo
- San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato
 - Hernández Macías 110 Pátzcuaro, Michoacán
 - Cuesta Vieja de Quiroga 12

Michael Crichton dies of cancer

BY HILLEL ITALIE Associated Press

Michael Crichton, the million-selling author who made scientific research terrifying and irresistible in such thrillers as "Jurassic Park," "Timeline" and "The Andromeda Strain," has died of cancer, his family said.

Crichton died Tuesday in Los Angeles at age 66 after privately battling cancer.

"Through his books, Michael Crichton served as an inspiration to students of all ages, challenged scientists in many fields, and illuminated the mysteries of the world in a way we could all understand," his family said in a statement.

"While the world knew him as a great storyteller that challenged our preconceived notions about the world around us - and entertained us all while doing so - his wife Sherri, daughter Taylor, family and friends knew Michael Crichton as a devoted husband, loving father and generous friend who inspired each of us to strive to see the wonders of our world through new eyes."

He was an experimenter and popularizer known for his stories of disaster and systematic breakdown, such as the rampant microbe of "The Andromeda Strain" or the dinosaurs running madly in "Jurassic Park." Many of his books became major Hollywood movies, including "Jurassic Park," "Rising Sun" and "Disclosure." Crichton himself directed and wrote "The Great Train Robbery" and he co-wrote the script for the blockbuster "Twister."

In 1994, he created the award-winning TV hospital series "ER." He's even had a dinosaur named for him, Crichton's ankylosaur.

"Michael's talent out-scaled even his own dinosaurs of Jurassic Park," said "Jurassic Park" director Steven Spielberg, a friend of Crichton's for 40 years.

"He was the greatest at blending science with big theatrical concepts, which is what gave credibility to dinosaurs again walking the Earth. ... Michael was a gentle soul who reserved his flamboyant side for his novels. There is no one in the wings that will ever take his place."

John Wells, executive producer of "ER" called the author "an extraordinary man. Brilliant, funny, erudite, gracious, exceptionally inquisitive and always thoughtful."

"No lunch with Michael lasted less than three hours and no subject was too prosaic or obscure to attract his interest. Sexual politics, medical and scientific ethics, anthropology, archaeology, economics, astronomy, astrology, quantum physics, and molecular biology were all regular topics of conversation."

In recent years, he was the rare novelist granted a White House meeting with President Bush, per-



Crichton began writing novels as a student at Harvard Medical School.

haps because of his skepticism about global warming, which Crichton addressed in the 2004 novel, "State of Fear." Crichton's views were strongly condemned by environmentalists, who alleged that the author was hurting efforts to pass legislation to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide.

If not a literary giant, he was a physical one, standing 6 feet and 9 inches, and ready for battle with the press. In a 2004 interview with The Associated Press, Crichton came with a tape recorder, text books and a pile of graphs and charts as he defended "State of Fear" and his take on global warming.

"I have a lot of trouble with things that don't seem true to me," Crichton said at the time, his large, manicured hands gesturing to his graphs. "I'm very uncomfortable just accepting. There's something in me that wants to pound the table and say that 'that's not true.'" He spoke to few scientists about his questions, convinced that he could interpret the data himself.

One of four siblings, Crichton was born in Chicago and grew up in Roslyn, Long Island. His father was a journalist and young Michael spent much of his childhood writing extra papers for teachers. He was tall and awkward. Writing was a way to escape; Mark Twain and Alfred Hitchcock were his role models.

Figuring he would not be able to make a living as writer, and not good enough at basketball, he decided to become a doctor. He studied anthropology at Harvard College, and later graduated from Harvard Medical School. During medical school, he turned out books under pseudonyms. He had modest success with his writing and decided to pursue it.

His first hit, "The Andromeda Strain," was written while he was still in medical school and quickly caught on upon its 1969 release. Crichton was married five times and had one child. A private funeral is planned.



Susana Vázquez Hernández



Pascuala Díaz Lopes



Julio César Corro Lara



Isaac Ramos Padilla

PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE NEWS/JIM JOHNSTON