



The Colours of the Earth
Modern Textile Art in Mexico
22 October 2025 to 6 April 2026

Presented as part of the WMW Contemporary programme, the exhibition offers a visual and sensory homage to the rich textile traditions of Mexico's Indigenous communities. It illustrates how ancient dyeing and weaving traditions are being revived and reinterpreted in a contemporary context.

Between tradition, identity, and ecology

The exhibits – textile installations, festive ceremonial huipiles, and contemporary textiles in vibrant colours and intricate patterns, along with traditional weaving tools, colourful fabrics, and photo and video portraits – offer insight into the world of modern Mexican textile art. This art form is based on centuries-old knowledge that is deeply intertwined with nature and the social structures of the communities.

The works open a window onto a world in which colour is not merely decorative, but also conveys identity, history, and worldview – and in which the colourants used, derived from plant, animal, or mineral sources, reflect the ecological diversity of the respective regions.

The exhibited objects were created as part of a unique collaborative art project rooted in the tradition of socially engaged and participatory art. The works on display should not be regarded as autonomous individual pieces, but rather as material expressions of a collective, relational, and process-oriented practice.



The Colours of the Earth invites visitors to experience textile art as a vibrant, intergenerational practice that engages with current fashion trends and the role of social media in transforming the trade and visibility of Indigenous textile art.

A collaborative art project

In 2008, curator, researcher, artist, and educator Carlos Barrera Reyes initiated a project with weavers and dyers in thirty Indigenous communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas (Mexico). In community-based workshops, participants revived traditional techniques, developed new ones, and fostered creative exchange between art, craft, ecology, and science.

The exhibition showcases the results of this dialogue that has unfolded over the past seventeen years. ***The Colours of the Earth*** is a call for cultural diversity, for the recognition of traditional knowledge, and for new forms of coexistence. In contrast to global exhibition practices that often represent Indigenous culture from an external perspective, ***The Colours of the Earth*** is curated from within — with and for the communities.

“This project did not arise from a desire to represent others, but rather to undertake a journey together with them. It is the result of many conversations, of cooking and sharing meals together, of experimenting, failing, and discovering. I am less interested in the artwork as an object than in what takes place during its creation: the relationships, the learning, the disagreements, and the mutual transformation. Colours are charged with history, emotions, and resistance. Working with natural colourants is also a political act: it means caring for the land, listening to what your hands have to say, and recognizing that art can be a place to sow, not just to show.” — Carlos Barrera Reyes

“We were thrilled to be able to work with Carlos Barrera Reyes. His artistic, research-based community project is not only unique, but also resonates with our museum’s collections and underscores their relevance as a living archive of knowledge.” — Claudia Banz, Director of the Weltmuseum



Spread across three gallery spaces, the exhibition features works from the private collection of Carlos Barrera Reyes — some of which are being shown outside Mexico for the first time. The exhibition also connects closely to the museum's Mesoamerican Gallery, which displays historical huipiles from Mexico and Guatemala — many collected by the Weltmuseum Wien's former director, Etta Becker-Donner (1911–1975). A specially designed photo collage links the museum's historical holdings with the current show, creating an exciting dialogue between past and present.

TOUR THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

The Art of Weaving – Materials and Skills

The first room is all about craftsmanship. Backstrap looms, portraits of the weavers, regional maps, and video portraits for each piece illustrate the origin, making, and vivid visual language of the textiles. The dye samples on display are accompanied by infographics showing their names in several languages, their natural sources, and the respective dyeing processes.

The Ceremonial Huipil – Tradition and Identity

The second section of the exhibition is dedicated to ceremonial huipiles. In Nahuatl, this term refers to festive garments worn by women during religious ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. They are far more than just garments: they embody cultural identity, social belonging, and spiritual meaning. Through their designs, patterns, and materials, these visual languages speak of a deep connection with the environment, history, belief, and cultural storytelling traditions. In some communities, a huipil is woven each year specifically to clothe a statue of the Virgin Mary. They are also an indispensable part of carnival celebrations – where they are often worn by men – and folk art competitions.

The Contemporary Huipil – Fashion and Social Media

The final room looks to the present: it explores the role that fashion, contemporary design, and social media play in promoting Indigenous textile art. Many weavers have become successful entrepreneurs who rely on digital platforms to present, network, and sell their work. The modern huipiles on display reflect these developments: they combine tradition and innovation into a vibrant cultural practice that has been passed from generation to generation. They express cultural self-awareness while adapting to changing markets and new audiences.



At the end of the exhibition, a video documents the making of the project and introduces the people behind the textiles – their stories, skills, and visions.

Tradition in transition

The making of a huipil begins with the selection and dyeing of the threads – traditionally using colourants derived from plants, insects, and minerals that grow or are sourced in the weavers' immediate surroundings. In the twentieth century, this knowledge gradually faded as industrially dyed yarns took over the market. Since the 1990s, though, natural dyeing has been enjoying a revival.

Some of the garments on display are historical reproductions, while others feature experimental colour compositions and natural colourants used for the first time.

The exhibition was curated by Carlos Barrera Reyes, in collaboration with Renée Riedler, conservator, and Gerard van der Bussel, curator of the North and Central America Collection at Weltmuseum Wien.

The exhibition was designed by Martina Berger.

Exhibition website: <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/the-colours-of-the-earth/>

Carlos Barrera Reyes – Biography

Carlos Barrera Reyes (born 1978) is a visual artist. His artistic practice moves between ethnographic exploration and collaborative, participatory, and socially engaged approaches. His work is characterized by an intensive exploration of a wide variety of materials and formats, while also reflecting a deep commitment to the educational and communal aspects of art.

Barrera Reyes' works have been shown in group exhibitions in Mexico, Spain, Venice, and Denmark, and are included in collections such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

<https://www.loscoloresdelatierramexico.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/carlosbarrerareyes/>

<https://placesjournal.org/article/a-genealogy-of-colors-chiapas-mexico/?cn-reloaded=1>



Accompanying programme

The supporting cultural education programme for children, adults, and schools will be regularly supplemented and expanded throughout the course of the exhibition. Detailed information on all programme activities and general information about the special exhibition can be found here:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/the-colours-of-the-earth>

Programme for adults

Thu, 23 October, 3:30 pm

Dyeing with fresh plants

Indigo workshop with Anita Bauer

Fri, 24 October, 2 pm

Creating silk scarves

Dyeing workshop with Carlos Barrera Reyes and Beatrice Consagra Breton using the natural colourants cochineal (*Dactylopius coccus*) and Aztec marigold (*Tagetes erecta*)

Sat, 25 October, 2 pm

Deep Dive: The Colours of the Earth

Guided tour with Carlos Barrera Reyes and demonstration of a hip loom

Fri, 21 November, 2:30 pm

Weaving workshop for adults

Ribbon weaving with Gundula Hickisch

Children's programme

Sat, 22 November, 2:30 pm

Weave your own friendship bracelet!

Children's workshop with Gundula Hickisch (7–12 years old)

Subject to change.

Press photographs

Press releases and images for up-to-date coverage of special exhibitions and projects at the Weltmuseum Wien are available for download free of charge from our press area:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/press/>

María Santiago weaving a ceremonial huipil with feathered threads. Zinacantán, Chiapas, 2019.
Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Carlos Barrera Reyes Carlos is leading a natural dye workshop for the Llana Huaricnn collective in San Andrés Chicahuaxtla, Oaxaca, 2019. Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Martha Julia Méndez Hernández weaving a ceremonial huipil as Rachel Barber documents the process. Magdalena, Aldama, Chiapas, 2022.
Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Ulises Tapia Merino creating the embroidery for the ceremonial Virgin Mary huipil. Santa María Huazolotitlán, Oaxaca, 2019.
Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Dyeing cotton with caracoles púrpuras/purple snails (Plicopurpura pansa), 2021.
Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Cotton dyed with indigo (detail).
Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Fidencia Pérez Hernández weaving a motif symbolizing the universe on the lichen-dyed loom. Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



Rosa Díaz Pérez weaving a ceremonial Guadalupe huipil. Peña Blanca, San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, 2023. Photo: Carlos Barrera Reyes



**Opening hours, admission fees & tickets**

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/>

Contacts for your visit

Cultural education, guided tours, and programme registrations

+43 1 534 30 - 5150

kulturvermittlung@weltmuseumwien.at

Information, questions, and suggestions

+43 1 534 30 - 5052

info@weltmuseumwien.at

Programme & events

All events can be found online in the Weltmuseum Wien [event calendar](#).

Social media

Follow the Weltmuseum Wien on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

#WeltmuseumWien

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We request that, in addition to mentioning your medium, you also specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass. Many thanks for your understanding!

Press contact

Mag. Dr. Wolfgang Lamprecht (Head)

Mag. Sarah Aistleitner

Tanja Stigler

T +43 1 52524 - 4021, - 4025, - 4019

presse@weltmuseumwien.at