

Alfombrismo: Ephemeral Art Utopia

José Alejandro Lira Carmona

Alfombristas Mexicanos, Mexico

karla@alfombristasmexicanos.org

Abstract

The way in which we experience public space is closely related to the sociocultural and environmental conditions of the context. Like the garden – in the strict philosophical sense – Traditional Tapestry ephemeral art represents a utopia; it stands for an aesthetic theory of beauty and a vision of happiness. Traditional ephemeral art is conceptualized as a utopian space where diverse elements, people, as well as a wide variety of activities converge; those are the ones who transform reality through cultural expression, exploring habits and values which pursue a common goal in a livingly way, and improve social coexistence. Tapestry ephemeral art temporarily and actively transforms their surroundings. It is in that public space where it is embraced that a dialogue is modelled; a dialogue where not only formal appearance but also designing constructive one converges, as an artistic, philosophical, and spiritual expression of its community itself. Such artistic intervention allows physical proximity; in a whole overview vision of urban context, design displays Mexican art values and transforms public space. The greater the proximity, the greater the change in the scale of the work, therefore, it is possible to feel immersed in the piece and identify the natural material, which in its arrangement and place, reveals the garden utopia – symbol of harmony between itself and the atmosphere portrayed in a living work of art.

Nowadays, the isolated streets in many different parts of the world reflect a universal reality which urges a re-connection with the natural environment to which we belong, as well as a transformation of the sociocultural interactions that emerge from responsibility, equality and the common good. As a Master Tapestry artist, José Alejandro Lira Carmona explores these ideas through the Traditional Tapestry of Ephemeral Art from Huamantla.

Keywords: experience public space, utopia Traditional Tapestry ephemeral art, cultural expression, social coexistence

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Huamantla's Traditional Tapestry Ephemeral Art

The way in which public space is experienced is closely related to the sociocultural and environmental context. Since ancient times, Tlaxcala has been the scene of the groups settled in this area, who have developed a society and culture with a strong relation to the natural environment. A widely recognized element was the great mountain, which they called *Matlacueytl*, and means "the one with the blue skirts". From this mountain flows the river of life, whose source provides what is necessary to subsist. The mountain was considered a living deity to whom the community offered up in a cyclical way, determined by the period of rain and the irrigation of the crops, thus *Matlacueytl* was kept present as a member of the community (Torquemada 1615).



Figure 1. Matlalcueytl landscape. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

With the Spanish colonization, the cult of the mountain became the veneration of the Virgin Mary of the Assumption, known by the people as "La Caridad" (Charity); who is celebrated in August, the time of year when the crops have grown and the field flourished. The community transforms them into offerings that over time, ingenuity and creativity gave rise to the Huamantla's Ephemeral Carpets and Rugs.

Huamantla's Ephemeral Carpets and Rugs

Carpets

From the social organization and central urban structure made up of neighbourhoods; the worship to the Virgin of Charity was organized throughout the month of August; in this way, each neighbourhood or group of people was allowed to have a space for their offering. These offerings were made with flowers and fruits from the fields and the natural environment in the month of August, with time these offerings became what we now know as Carpets.

The carpets are figurative compositions with a central image representing the Virgin, a scene or another religious icon; They are made with earth, gravel, sand and seeds that are framed with floral borders. The carpets are exclusively contemplative and are changed night to night during the 31 days of August.



Figure 2. In the filigree. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 3a. The tradition comes. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 3b. Offering. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

Rugs

The location of the City of Huamantla has great advantages due to its proximity to the forest and agricultural production areas, but it also poses risk of flooding as it is in the direction of the runoff and the mainstream of the mountain. Oral tradition recounts the event that originated the procession of the Virgin of Charity around 1888, in which the city was threatened by a storm that did not cease. The population of Huamantla in a gesture of survival, rang the church bells and improvised a procession with the Virgin of Charity through the streets to avoid a catastrophe, it is said that after this action, the rain stopped. Since then, the image of the Virgin of Charity goes out in procession on August 15th, and the community, in an act of gratitude, organizes by streets the path through which the procession will pass. This gesture is what will give rise to the traditional ephemeral rug that, together with the carpets, are the maximum expression of collective ephemeral art, known as "The night that no one sleeps."



Figure 4. Procession between lights and songs. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 5. The turn. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

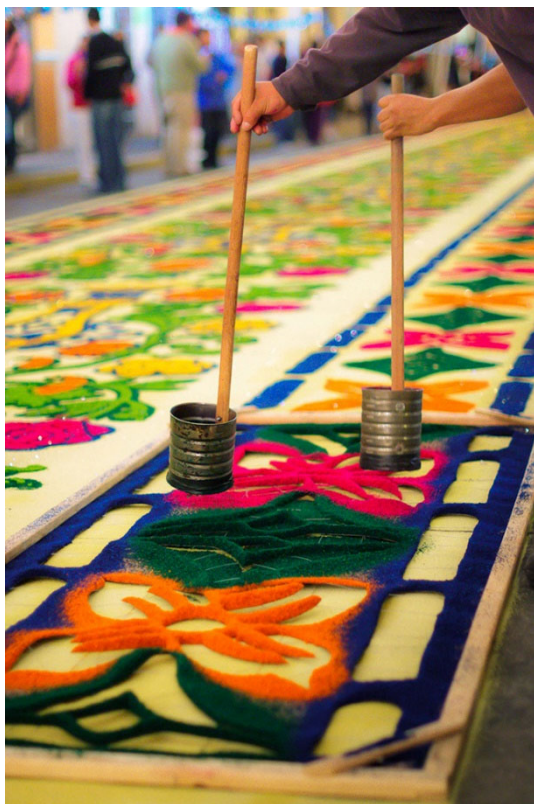


Figure 6. Weaving fraternity. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

The rugs are decorative and are made with sand and sawdust in a wide range of colours, forming abstract shapes and various motifs. They are made along the streets and are characterized by being even more ephemeral and fragile than rugs, they last only a few hours and will be undone when the procession passes over them.

Tapestry Ephemeral Art and Community

The carpets and rugs are manifestations of Huamantla's cultural identity, they are artistic and collective expressions in which the entire community participates. The works are materially ephemeral, but they are permanently registered in the collective ideology and spirit of the people, it is what we call Tapestry Ephemeral Art.



Figure 7. Making. Night that nobody sleeps. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 8. Sowing. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

Tapestry Ephemeral Art is a dynamic expression of social inclusion in which the community organizes and generates consensus to achieve a common goal: to transform public space into an act of faith, gratitude and generosity, which, like a tree, regenerates cyclically.

The Tapestry Ephemeral Art of Mexico has been forged historically in Huamantla; it has evolved along with the history of the city and its inhabitants.

In chronological order and starting from the organization of the community, the activity of Tapestry Ephemeral Art has formed a structure, which we can represent in an analogous way as a tree with 4 large roots that support tradition. These roots are: 1) Environment, 2) Spirituality, 3) History and 4) Culture or tradition.

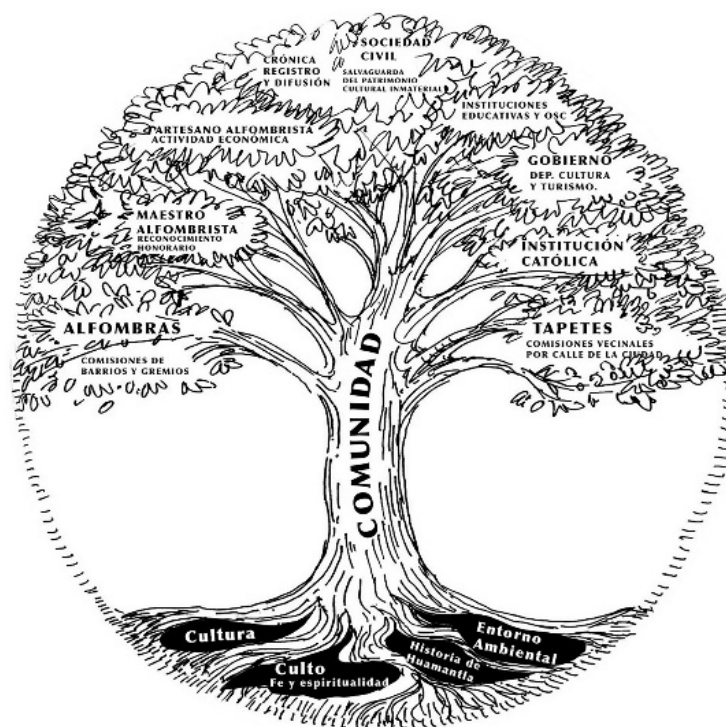


Figure 9. Tapestry Ephemeral Art like a tree. Image: Alejandro Lira

Like a tree, Tapestry Ephemeral Art represents balance, diversity, integration and interconnection; it is like a living being that grows and brings benefit to itself and its environment. Each element that makes up this structure has an autonomous definition and personality, but always in bond and complement with the others.

Carpet is an inclusive cultural manifestation, individuals in their diversity can contribute and integrate from the creative process to the artistic culmination of ephemeral carpets and rugs. As a consequence, it is a current tradition that is in constant transformation and innovation, it adapts, takes the form and resources that the community has at a given time. Although Tapestry Ephemeral Art has a material or tangible purpose, its significance lies in the immaterial nature of the practice; in other words, the immaterial is everything that gives us a feeling of identity and that promotes respect for human diversity and creativity (UNESCO 2020).



Figure 10. Small hands. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 11. Algarabia. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

Tapestry Ephemeral Art and Public Space

In the streets of the historic center of Huamantla and in the atrium of the Basilica of Our Lady of Charity, is where the carpet traditionally occurs; These public spaces model a dialogue in which both the formal and constructive aspect of urban design converge, as well as the artistic, philosophical and spiritual expression of their community.



Figure 12. Generations, 13. Mold. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

This artistic intervention is experienced on more than one scale and promotes the physical approach of the viewer. In a visual experience that includes the urban context, the design exhibits the values of Mexican art and transforms the perception of the public space of daily use. The closer a spectator gets, the scale of the work changes, it is then possible to feel immersed in the piece and appreciate the natural material, the colors and textures that, in their arrangement, reveal the utopia of the garden - a symbol of harmony with the environment - embodied into a living work of art.

Thus, carpets temporarily and dynamically transform their environment, they are conceptualized as a utopian space where diverse elements, people and activities converge. Carpets, through cultural expression, transform reality, experientially exploring habits and values that promote good common and social coexistence. Currently, the health security that characterizes the year 2020 has become a historical moment that directly affects the way we experience public space, communicating and the oldest cultural expressions, tapestry ephemeral art is one of them.

The deserted streets in various parts of the world reflect a universal reality, which demands a reconnection with the natural environment to which we belong, and a transformation of the socio-cultural dynamics based on responsibility, equity and the common good. The Huamantla community, in the absence of rugs in the streets, made a gesture at home to offer their rugs of ephemeral art, with the intention of preserving their traditions without putting their health at risk and complying with distancing restrictions.



Figure 14. The forms. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

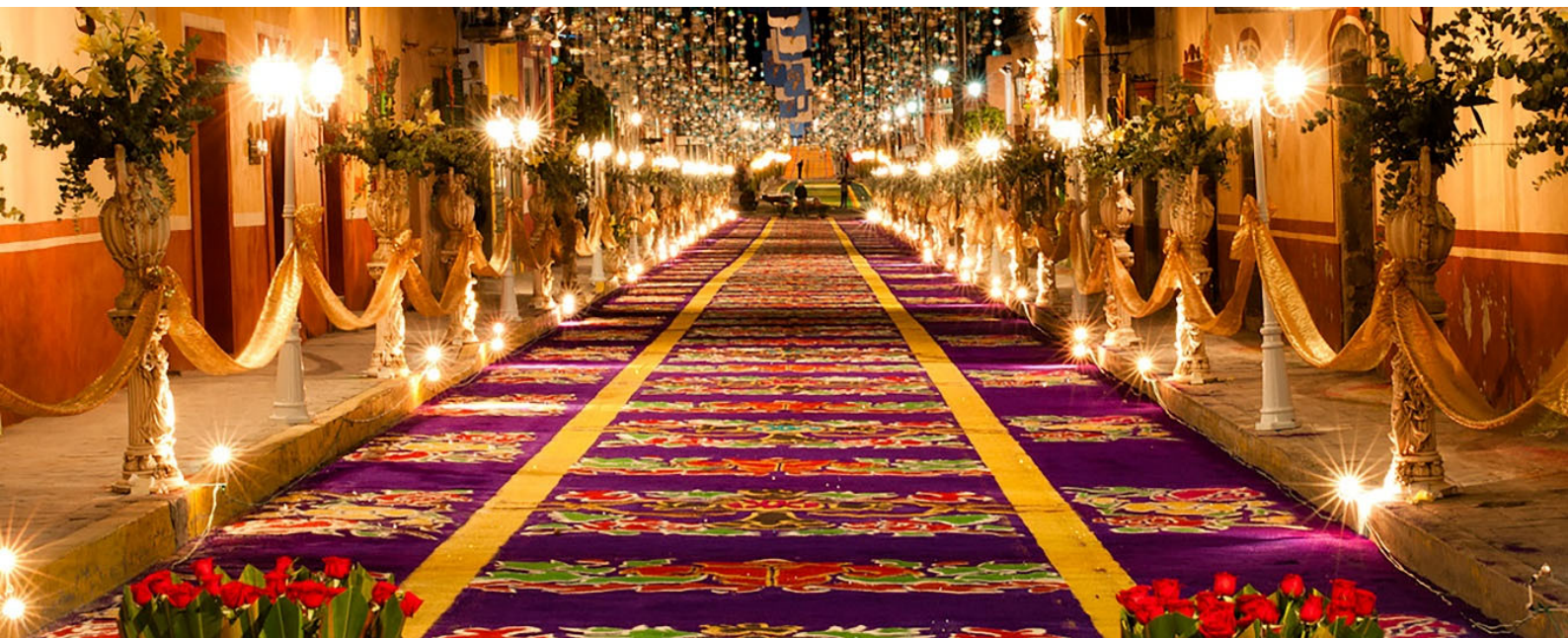


Figure 15. Light to the horizon. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño

Huamantla community through their carpets build a utopia "an ideal garden that summarizes their desires", ephemeral in character but that regenerates the social fabric of the community with total respect for diversity and allows them to relate cyclically to their means of survival, their own your environment (Beruete 2016).

Based on this principle, Huamantla's tapestry ephemeral art has values that strengthen the community and its individuals, contributing from culture to counteract social and environmental issues and enable us to assume culture as a commitment to the challenges of society, coexistence and peace, quality of life, human rights and the recognition of the environment as a vital support for humanity (Lara Plata 2016.).



Figure 16. Stellar. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 17. Strength. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño



Figure 18. Maker. Photo: Eduardo Avendaño.

Acknowledgement

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