

# EDMONTON JOURNAL

## **In Mexican rodeo, art mingles with sport U.S. show 'incredibly beautiful'**

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### ARTE EN LA CHARRERIA: THE ARTISANSHIP OF MEXICAN EQUESTRIAN CULTURE

Showing at: Royal Alberta Museum, 12845 102nd Ave. Until: April 13

Fans of cowboy culture are in for a rip-roaring treat at the Royal Alberta Museum's Arte en la Charrería: The Artisanship of Mexican Equestrian Culture.

This international exhibition out of Washington, D.C., is a stunning display of lushly decorated sombreros, saddles, bits, spurs and fantastically embroidered leather rodeo and parade costumes.

The objects were all used by traditional Mexican cowboys -- men and women -- in La Charrería, a storied equestrian sport featuring fancy synchronized riding as well as events akin to those in modern Canadian rodeos, says Ruth McConnell, RAM assistant curator of ethnology.

"In 1933, La Charrería was made the official sport of Mexico, and regulations were put into place to make sure it didn't die out."

While many Albertans may not have heard of this fascinating sport, McConnell notes that La Charrería's origins date back to the 16th century, when Spanish colonizers brought the hacienda ranching system to the New World. Celebrations of equestrian skills came along.

Like rodeo culture in the U.S. and Canada, La Charrería eventually extended into music, food, clothing and accessories.

We talked to McConnell about the unusual exhibit:

Not only are all the objects on display here wildly beautiful and exquisite in their crafting, there's a real mix of inspirations and cultural touchstones. Are we seeing a sort of cultural hybrid here?

Not so much a hybrid as a pulling together of different traditions into one celebration. You see all these different kinds of culture references being used all at the same time, including native Mexican designs alongside images from the Roman Catholic tradition and dresses worn by women riders that were designed to pay homage to women fighters of the Mexican revolution.

I just love the symbolism we see at play in this work.

What is your feeling about hosting a show of this quality and range?

It's an incredibly beautiful show, and we are very happy to have it here. What makes this show so exciting for us to host is not only the fact that these objects are so beautiful, but we can learn so much from them ... . Who knew there were women fighters in the Mexican Revolution and that they played an important role? The objects themselves are so individually fascinating in that they took so much work and so many craftspeople to make. Some of these saddles alone would have taken a whole year to make and would have needed all these different craftspeople ... including embroiderers, weavers, leather- and metal-workers.

I notice, too, that you have some photos from our provincial archives. What do they represent?

When we decided to bring the show in, we went out and looked for connections between Alberta and Mexican cowboy culture and discovered that several Mexican-born cowboys had lived and ranched in the province, including Jesus Lavarro and Luis Movenno. We also came across photos of Magdaleno Ramos, a famous La Charrería performer who was invited to participate in the first-ever Calgary Stampede. He went on to win second place in the fancy roping event at the rodeo.

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