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The art of horsemanship at Museo Alameda

By **Elda Silva** - Express-News

The intricately embroidered saddles, elegant costumes and other accoutrements in the González family charrería collection are more than just showpieces.

"We use everything in the collection — the dresses, everything," says Marisú González German, who with her father Luis González Cardenas, has preserved and expanded the collection started by her great-grandfather.

The majority of objects in "Arte en la Charrería: The Artisanry of Mexican Equestrian Culture," an exhibit currently on display at Museo Alameda, are from the González family collection.

The show includes more than 300 pieces, many dating from the late 1800s when Gumaro González, a charro (horseman) and landowner in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, began collecting charrería artifacts.

Rooted in Spain, the equestrian sport evolved from riding techniques developed by indigenous Mexican ranch workers. During the 19th century, charros began organizing events to demonstrate their riding and roping skills and to compete against each other.

In addition to the objects on display in the traveling exhibition, González and her husband, Gabriel Cabello Martínez, figure the family has at least 300 more pieces in storage. The collection includes the greatest number of charro saddles of any charrería collection in Mexico, many of which were custom made for González's grandfather, Roberto González.

Like his father before him, Roberto González was a charro, "and he discovered this unique work made by Mexican artisans as an artistic expression," Cabello says. "He thought that he had to collect these artistic items, because the saddles — as you can probably see in the museum — are embroidered in a very fine touch. So he decided to travel all around the country and to talk with the artisans.

Some of the pieces, he ordered (from) the artisans. Some of them, he bought in other parts of the country. So he was the one who made the collection grow."

Currently, González and Cabello are focused on adding trajes to the collection. One of the more recent acquisitions includes a girl's Adelita outfit, a high-necked, long-sleeved dress with a full skirt used by participants in the escaramuza, a precision equestrienne team riding event. The white-and-pink costume, embroidered with roses and an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, was worn by the couple's daughter, Fabiola, for her First Communion.

Along with objects from the González family collection, the exhibit includes textiles — chiefly serapes — from the collection of J. Manuel Basurto García Rojas and spurs from the collection of José Lugo Guerrero.

Even more than growing the collection, González and Cabello's mission is to show it.

"This is the first time that a charrería collection travels abroad (from) Mexico, at least in this size of exposition," Cabello says. "Arte en la Charrería: The Artisanry of Mexican Equestrian Culture," is at Museo Alameda, 101 S. Santa Rosa, through May 2. Call (210) 299-4300; www.thealameda.org.