



One of the most exciting things about vacationing in Oaxaca is the large artist community that lives and works there. My wife Judith and I traveled there last May and came home with many more pieces for our collection than we had ever imagined. Judith is a collector by nature. Every square inch of our tiny Manhattan apartment is filled with a treasure from one of our trips. I wanted to experience more than just the exchange of money with a merchant—I wanted to meet the artists. Having grown up in a family of sculptors (my father took commissions for his work from around the world), I wanted to see how these people crafted their pieces, how they lived, and what their art meant to them. Judith was more interested in buying art, but she finally agreed to go with me to meet a folk artist I heard about named Henry Luis Ramos.

As Judith and I stepped into the adobe shop, a cheerful black-haired boy greeted us. “My father’s expecting you,” he said as he led us down a hall into a spacious room filled with hundreds of statues, clay pots, and tin artifacts that Ramos designed.

The brilliantly colored pieces captivated me. I couldn’t stop investigating and touching them. I could see the influence of the Mayan culture and other native tribes. “My father did these,” the boy said with a wide grin. In the center of the room, at a heavy table, sat a salt-and-pepper-bearded man in a green shirt and tan overalls.

Hecho en Mexico

Exploring Mexican Folk Art

“Hello,” he said as he took off his wire-frame glasses, stood, and shook my hand. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance,” he said. Judith shook his hand quickly, but she seemed more interested in the art that filled the large room.

Ramos’s accent was quite thick and rich. I sat at the table with him while Judith browsed. The table was covered with tiny pottery artifacts, most of which depicted Mayan designs: jaguars, birds, and a two-headed serpent. I recognized the serpent as a symbol of Tlaloc, the rain god. They were beautiful! I could tell by the glint in Judith’s eye that she was impressed. I half expected her to blurt out, “How much for everything in this room?” I tried hard to ignore her and focus my attention on Ramos. I was surprised by this charming but simple man, with his wild gray beard and tiny wire glasses. Ramos was raised on a farm in a small town near Xalapa, where his father was a farmer and metalloterapist. Ramos’s mother was a teacher and artist, but spent most of her time working on their small farm and raising their four sons. Their grandfather also lived on the family farm, where he spent his retirement repairing old furniture for folks in the small town. He made whirly gigs and other toys from tin scraps for the boys in town.









