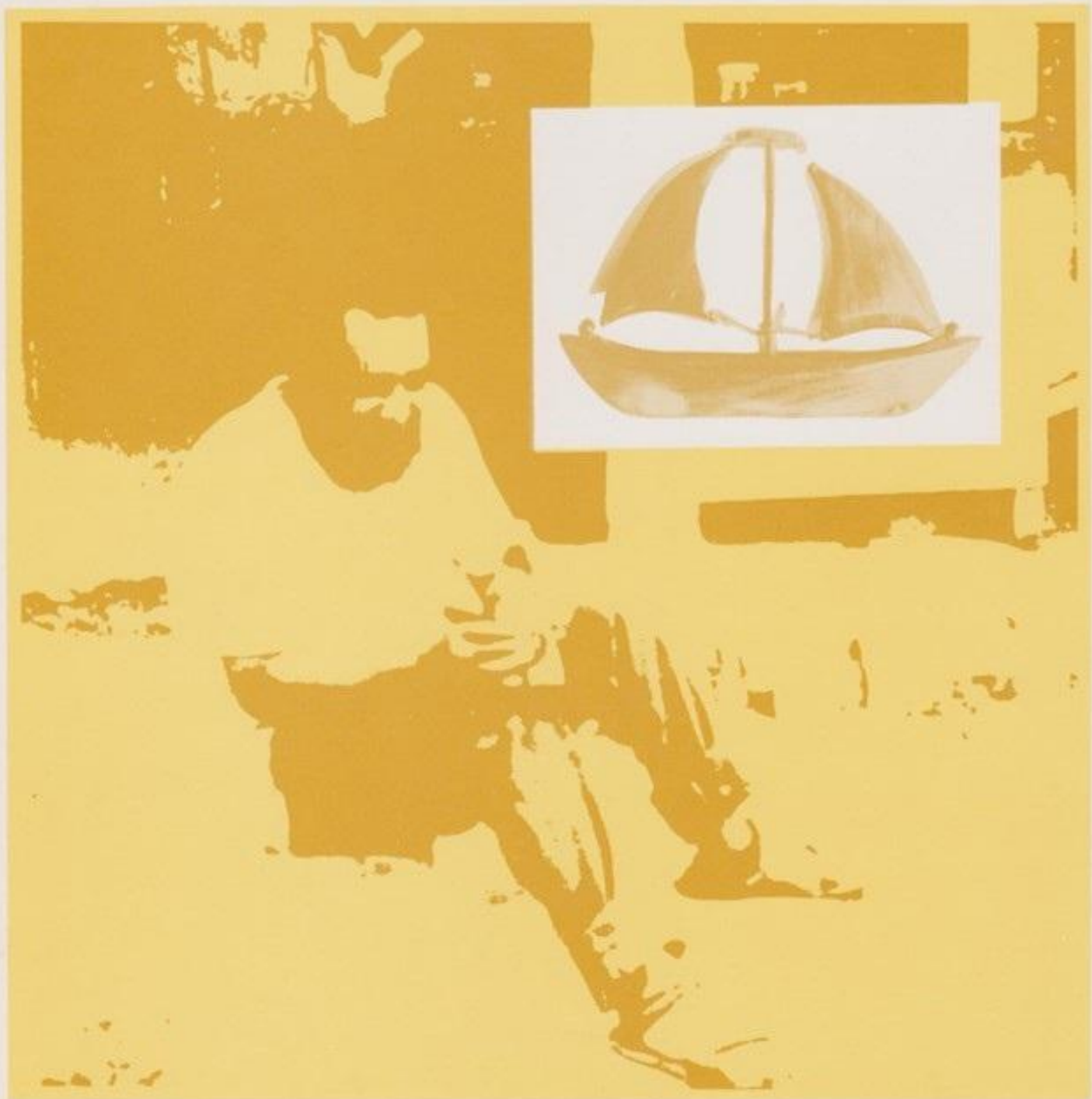




Popular Tradition



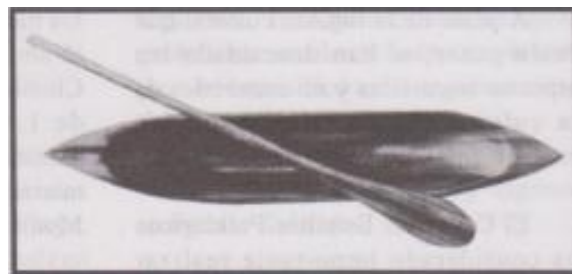
Folklore Studies Center
University of San Carlos of Guatemala



WOODWORKING:

Folk Art and Craftsmanship

*FROM THE VILLAGE OF EL REMATE, MUNICIPALITY OF FLORES,
DEPARTMENT OF PETÉN*



0. Introduction:

The purpose of this article is to present a sample of folk art and craftsmanship from the department of Petén. In this case, the woodwork produced in the village of El Remate in the municipality of Flores of said department.

The interest in conducting field research on this subject arose as a result of the teaching work carried out by the author in the department of Petén, where she taught Sociology and courses in the Law and Notary program of the Faculty of Legal and Social Sciences at the University Extension of Universidad Mariano Gálvez, during the months of March to November of 1995. Thus, during those months, the field research was conducted, and its

concrete results are presented on the following pages.

I would like to express my gratitude to Universidad Mariano Gálvez, especially to Licenciado Manfredo Osorio, Regional Centers Coordinator of said university, for giving me the opportunity to teach at the Petén Extension; to the students of the Law and Notary program at that extension, especially to Certified Public Accountant Abraham Fión Lizama, to whom I owe the transportation fare for traveling from San Benito to El Remate; to Mrs. Estrella Lemos de Castellanos, who kindly provided me with information from the municipal office of Flores; to Mr. Alfaro López Catellanos, who provided me with bibliography on Petén; and to Professor Crescencio Chan Trujillo, who accompanied me throughout the fieldwork. Finally, to the artists and artisans of

El Remate, whose names are listed at the end of this bulletin.

In addition to the motivation previously expressed, it is worth noting that for those of us who are interested in learning about expressions of popular culture, the curiosity and drive to investigate them are present in all places and at all times.

It is well known that the department of Petén is the largest in the Republic of Guatemala and, in terms of area, it geographically occupies half of the country.

This department, which has a great variety of natural, mineral, and forest resources both renewable and non-renewable is considered the Fifth Lung of the World. Ecologically, Petén is regarded as such because its tropical rainforest sustains the life cycle of all ecosystems. It also holds immense

archaeological and cultural wealth, as it contains within its territory the main archaeological sites of the Maya culture (Guatemalan region).

Nevertheless, it is a marginalized department that has been irrationally exploited; land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few; infant mortality is severe; there is malnutrition, malaria, gastrointestinal diseases, among others. In addition, the illiteracy rate is high. there is unemployment, lack of (systematized) education; common and political violence, etc.

With regard to culture, emphasis has been placed on archaeological research, both by foreign and national scholars. The archaeological sites have been exploited for tourism.

Despite the cultural richness that Petén possesses, both the material and non-material aspects of contemporary culture such as those related to popular culture have been neglected

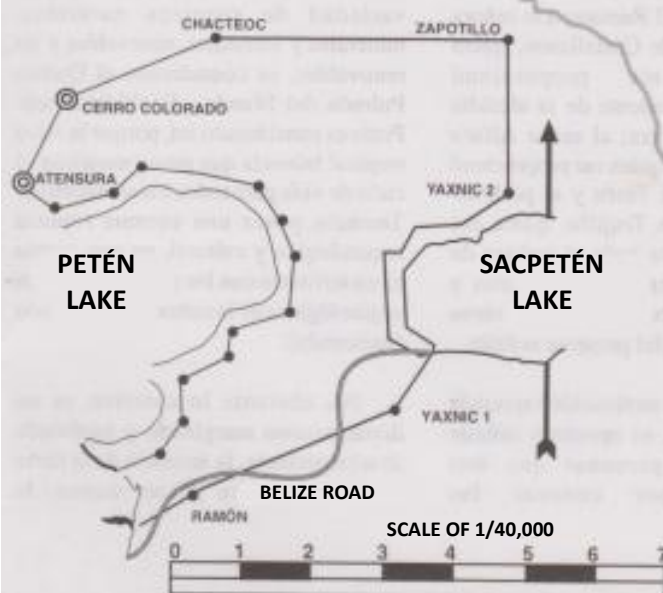
The Center for Folklore Studies has considered it important to carry out research on various aspects of the popular culture of this department. Particularly noteworthy are the works conducted by Claudia Dary, Alfonso Arrivillaga, and Ofelia Columba Déleon M., researchers from said center. The purpose of this bulletin is, as stated at the beginning, to present one aspect of Petén's popular culture: the woodworking of the village of El Remate.

I- Geographical Location

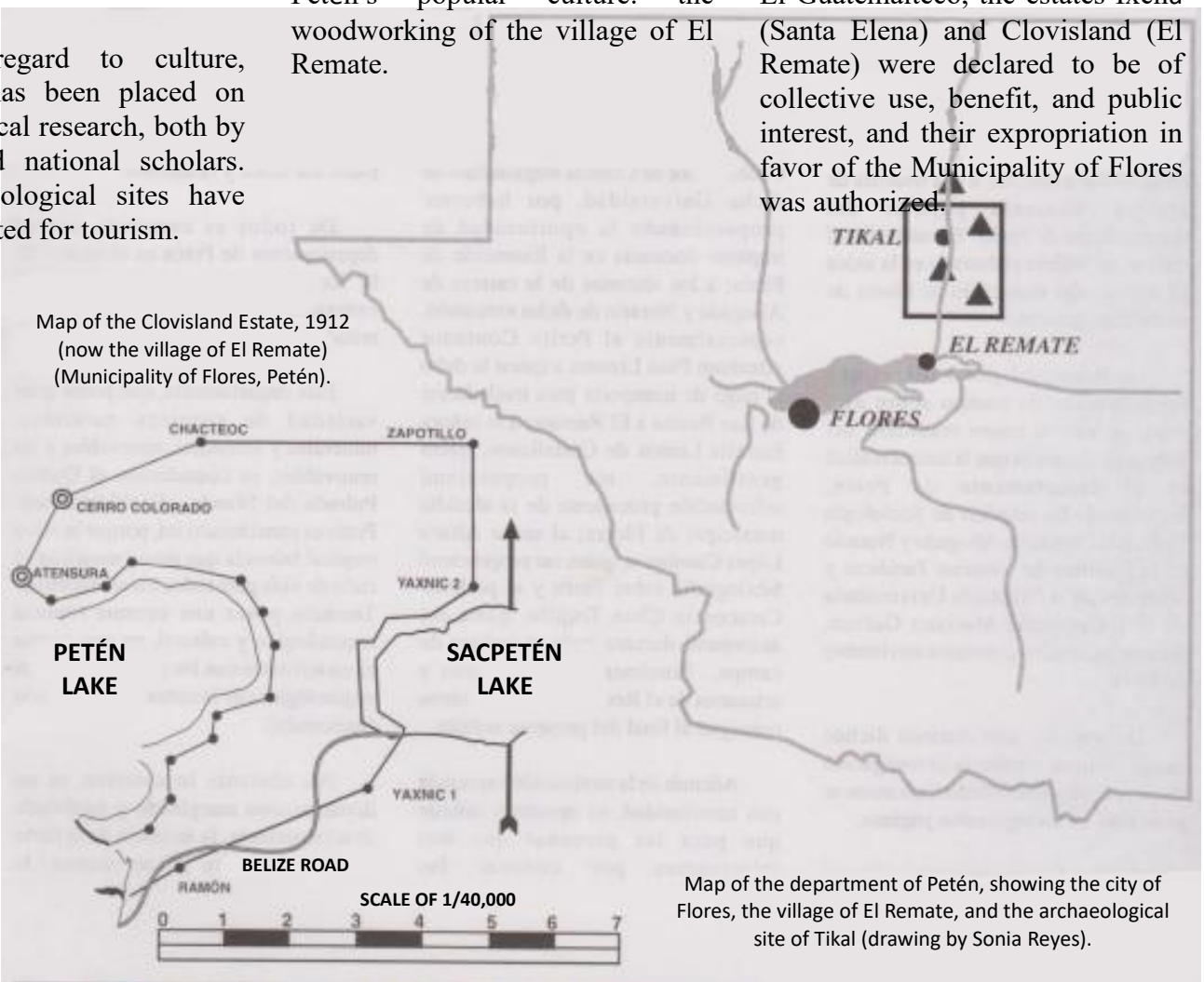
El Remate, now a village, was formerly known as the Clovisland estate, located under the jurisdiction of the municipalities of San José and Flores in the year 1912. It belonged to Licenciado Clodoveo Berges. That year, it covered 1,363 hectares, 15 ares, and 54 centiares, equivalent to 30 caballerías, 18 manzanas, and 3,843 varas. (Document from the Municipality of Flores, 1912).

On December 19, 1969, according to Decree #69-69 of the Congress of the Republic, published in the official newspaper *El Guatemalteco*, the estates Ixchá (Santa Elena) and Clovisland (El Remate) were declared to be of collective use, benefit, and public interest, and their expropriation in favor of the Municipality of Flores was authorized.

Map of the Clovisland Estate, 1912
(now the village of El Remate)
(Municipality of Flores, Petén).



Map of the department of Petén, showing the city of Flores, the village of El Remate, and the archaeological site of Tikal (drawing by Sonia Reyes).



On February 17, 1971, the sale, transfer, and conveyance of the aforementioned estates—Ixchá and Clovisland—in favor of the Municipality of Flores was legalized. The owner of both, Mr. Carlos Humberto Mena García, sold them for the amount of Q.10,000. (Testimony. Municipality of Flores. 1971). The village of El Remate is located 32 kilometers from the city of Flores, the departmental capital. The road leading to El Remate is in good condition and includes a fork toward San Andrés from the northern bypass route of Lake Petén Itzá. This road also leads to the archaeological site of Tikal (45 kilometers away).

The department of Petén has an approximate area of 35,854 km². It borders Mexico to the north, Belize to the east, the departments of Izabal and Alta Verapaz to the south, and Mexico again to the west.

It has 12 municipalities: Dolores, Flores, La Libertad, Melchor de Mencos, Poptún, San Andrés, San Benito, San Francisco, San José, San Luis, Santa Ana, and Sayaxché.

A part of the mountain range that crosses the Republic of Guatemala extends northward under the name Sierra de Chamá. From Alta Verapaz, it enters Petén, where it divides into several branches, the most well-known being the Maya Mountains. Another branch

continues northwest and stretches along the Usumacinta River to Tenosique, in the state of Tabasco (Mexico). This one is known as the Sierra del Lacandón.

The department is crossed by numerous rivers that carry their waters to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

The vegetation in this department is the most abundant and rich in the Republic. Among the most notable are forests of cedar and mahogany, as well as jabín, chaltemuchi, chaltecoco, canté, ebony, granadillo, zapotillo, guayacán, palomarias, etc.

Crops include vanilla, cacao, rubber, lime, orange, coconut, watermelon, melon, pineapple, mango, loquat, chicozapote, corozo, jocote, pacayas, plantains, sugar apple, corn, beans, sugarcane, sweet potato, onion, squash, chayote, rice, chili, etc. (*Geographic Dictionary of Guatemala*, Volume II, pp. 964–968. Mateo Morales Urrutia, 1961. Volume I, p. 379.)

As for the fauna, it can be said that Petén is the richest department in the republic. It also has species that are unique in the world.

As is the case with many towns in Guatemala, Petén does not have a paved road that connects its capital (located on the Island of Flores) to

Guatemala City. For this reason, several national airlines operate flights from the capital to Santa Elena, where the International Airport is located.

Nevertheless, the road that leads from Flores through Santa Elena to the village of El Remate is paved, as it also leads to the archaeological site of Tikal, which is frequently visited by both foreign and national tourists.

II- Historical and Social Aspects:

The department of Petén contains within its territory material (archaeological) remains of the Maya culture. It is the main region in Guatemala where the Maya lived and flourished.

Among the Maya groups, the Itzaes wandered through Yucatán and there founded the city of Chichén Itzá—this dates back to the Postclassic Maya period. They later moved to the lowlands of Petén between the 12th and 15th centuries. Eventually, they founded the city of Tayasal, of which remnants still remain in San Miguel Flores.

According to oral tradition and the *Chronicle* by Juan de Villagutierre Soto-Mayor, Hernán Cortés came into contact with the Itzaes in 1525, but the final conquest took place in 1697, when General Martín

Urzúa y Arismendi defeated them. It was not until the early 19th century that the territory began to be colonized by some mestizo families from Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, who settled in Petén for political reasons.

Claudia Dary notes that in the central area of Petén, the population is heterogeneous, corresponding to the aforementioned socio-cultural groups: indigenous Maya-Itzaes and mestizos, mainly from Yucatecan families who preserve Spanish traditions.

In the municipality of San Benito, there is a small group of Black Caribbeans who arrived in Petén around 1824.

Currently, the most traditional indigenous population in Petén is found in San José.

In the municipality of San Luis, there is a large population of Kekchí indigenous people, originally from Alta Verapaz, especially from the Cahabón River basin. This settlement likely began during the colonial period but intensified in the second half of the 19th century.

There are also some Kekchí indigenous people in Poptún.

Researcher Dary points out that, due to Petén's plant, animal, mineral, and archaeological wealth, many

foreigners have visited this territory. She notes that some of them likely stayed to live there and mixed with the native population or with those of Yucatecan origin, bringing their customs with them. They came, then, from various nations and cultures: Black people from Jamaica and Belize, ladinos from Honduras, Spaniards, English, Germans, North Americans, Mexicans, Canadians, Syrians, etc.

It is also worth mentioning the more recent colonization carried out by FYDEP (National Enterprise for the Promotion and Economic Development of Petén), created in 1959. The first step taken by FYDEP in the colonization process was to open a series of dirt roads. Between 1967 and 1970, approximately 400 families who had not been able to acquire land on the southern coast were relocated to the southeast (La Libertad and Sayaxché).

During the 1960s, the colonizing population came from the La Máquina settlement, Llanitos – Puerto de San José – and Tiquisate (Escuintla), Mazatenango (Suchitepéquez), Caballo Blanco settlement (Retalhuleu), zones 6, 7, and 19 – El Milagro (Guatemala City); Coatepeque, Cabricán (Quetzaltenango), and Nuevo Progreso (San Marcos). The majority of these settlers are ladinos, with the exception of those from Cabricán.

The foregoing is due to the fact that, with the aforementioned colonization, the intention was for settlers to be non-indigenous—preferably ladinos and, ideally, foreigners (a criterion that prevailed for many years due to the belief that indigenous peoples represented backwardness) (Claudia Dary, 1986, pp. 13–18).

In recent years, people from other departments of the Republic—such as Zacapa, Chiquimula, Jalapa, Jutiapa, etc.—have arrived, finding in this department a suitable place to live and work.

I share the opinion of researcher Dary when she states that it is not possible to speak of a common popular culture throughout the department of Petén, since each of the ethnic groups living there preserves its own traditions. However, it is possible to affirm that there exists a *Petenero* popular culture, one that has been shaped by the contributions of the Itza Maya—whose traditions are ancient—as well as by the contributions of Yucatecans, with Hispanic elements. Likewise, although more recent, the cultural contributions of southern Guatemalans (as *Peteneros* call those who have come from the southern part of the country) are also important.

(Claudia Dary, 1986, pp. 15–18)

III- General Considerations on Popular Culture, the Arts, and Handicrafts:

Guatemala is considered a multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic country. There are many cultures of different kinds, such as popular culture, traditional popular culture (folklore), rural popular culture, working-class popular culture, etc.

Most of the research conducted by the Center for Folklore Studies refers to traditional popular culture (folklore).

Nevertheless, in recent years, the importance of studying popular culture in general has been increasingly recognized.

It is therefore necessary to reflect on the concept of popular culture, as the present research falls within this field.

This approach is based on the understanding that popular culture or popular cultures are those created by the people or working classes of each country.

Likewise, it is recognized that in Latin American countries, as in others whose societies are divided into differentiated economic classes, various types of cultures coexist and are

interrelated: academic, elitist or dominant, official or hegemonic culture; popular culture or cultures; and mass culture.

Popular culture is produced with limited technical means—not because this is inherent to its nature, but due to the domination it has endured throughout history.

Popular culture may be urban or rural in nature. (Ofelia C. Déleon M., 1987).

Néstor García Canclini points out that: "the popular cannot, for us, designate a set of objects (such as handicrafts or dances), but rather a position and an action. We cannot define it by a particular type of product or message, because the meaning of these is constantly altered by social conflicts. No object is eternally guaranteed its popular character simply because it was produced by the people or eagerly consumed by them: popular meaning and value are won through social relations. It is use not origin the position and the capacity to evoke popular aspects or representations, that grants it this identity." (Néstor García Canclini, 1982, pp. 197–198).

García Canclini continues by stating: "for an event or object to be considered popular, its place of

origin (whether an Indigenous community or a music school) does not matter, nor does the presence or absence of folkloric signs (such as rusticity or the image of a pre-Columbian god), but rather the use that popular sectors make of them." (García Canclini, 1982, p. 202).

He also notes that: "in order for a popular culture to exist, it is not enough to simply unlock collective participation, as if there existed uncontaminated masses that only needed the removal of external barriers in order to freely express themselves. The thinking and practices of a people have also been shaped by the dominant culture (not only intellectuals and the bourgeoisie are ideologized). What worsens this situation is that their centuries-old distance from education and centers of power has deprived the people of the essential tools to understand the system that oppresses them and to change it." (García Canclini, 1982, p. 207).

Popular culture is dynamic and adapts to change. In this regard, Adolfo Colombres states:

"To liberate popular culture is to open it up to experimentation, not to force it to eternally repeat itself; to allow it to unlock its potentials frozen by colonialism, through a transfer of resources and technical means that

broaden its narrow framework of possibilities. In this way, by responding to new stimuli and demands from its surroundings, it will flourish, and the dignity of its bearers will narrow the gap with the dominant culture." (Adolfo Colombres, 1984).

Popular cultures coexist alongside official culture and "mass culture." In this regard, L. M. Lombardi Satriani states: "popular cultures do not coexist freely with other cultures, as they encounter prohibitions and censorship. They are continually placed at a crossroads: to give up or to choose the path of the imaginary, of the symbolic." The same author also indicates that "the protagonists of popular cultures become part of the category of consumers, since the culture of profit needs to minimize the expressions of those cultures so that its messages are better received." (L. M. Lombardi Satriani, 1978, pp. 121–125).

Satriani further asserts: "many elements of popular culture are absorbed by the culture of profit and distorted according to its purposes. But on a more general level, popular culture itself is globally subjected to a process of consumption." (L. M. Lombardi Satriani, 1978, p. 163).

There are several classifications of popular culture. The one listed below is based on the classical ethnographic division of culture. It is comprehensive, as it addresses material, social, and spiritual life. The categories it includes are:

Material Culture: includes everything "man, as a cultural agent, adds to the physical environment in which he lives; what he creates according to inherited and experienced techniques, using the materials provided by his land" (Isabel

Aretz, 1975, p. 248). Material culture, or ergological culture, refers to all material aspects of popular culture. It corresponds to what many anthropologists referred to as *ethnography* up until 1940.

Social Culture: encompasses human relational behavior and all group activities that determine its structure and functioning.

Spiritual Culture: includes all the better-known psychological phenomena found within popular culture.



The artist Rolando Soto states that he was the first to make the canoes.

It covers three categories: the artistic, the cognitive, and the belief-based. (Isabel Aretz, 1975, p. 262).

Each of the aforementioned categories is divided and subdivided into numerous topics.

Folk arts and crafts, which are the aspects of popular culture that are of particular interest here, are traditionally placed within material culture. However, if their aesthetic and social attributes and functions are considered, they may also be situated within spiritual and social culture.

There are numerous definitions of folk arts and crafts; the Center for Folklore Studies defines them as follows:

Folk Art: is "a form of plastic expression, endowed with aesthetic attributes, whose roots lie deep in the past, and whose existence is explained by the function it fulfills within the community that makes it possible. Folk art products are the result of individual activity carried out within the family, generally as a complement to subsistence tasks. Folk art is a manual, personal, and domestic craft. It is learned at home, with no guide other than the example of one's elders, and tends to emerge in places where access to raw materials is easy. Its production volume is limited and restricted to the



Mr. Rolando Soto states that this "art was not inherited, because there was no tradition."

local market." (Roberto Díaz Castillo, 1979, p. 48).

Folk Craftsmanship: is "a form of plastic expression endowed with aesthetic attributes—traditional, utilitarian, and anonymous. It differs from folk art in that it owes its existence to the collective workshop, organized hierarchically (masters, journeymen, apprentices), where fixed wages and time-bound work represent its defining socio-economic features." (Roberto Díaz Castillo, 1979, p. 48).

IV- Woodwork: Folk Art and Craftsmanship of the Village of El Remate:

Due to the particular characteristics of the

informants and their products, as well as the socio-economic conditions observed, the woodworking studied in the village of El Remate cannot be generally defined as either art or folk craft; since, in most cases, the objects are produced within the family, and the production is limited. There is, however, one workshop that of the Soto brothers where there are masters and apprentices, and the production is larger in scale.

The informants:

Most of the people interviewed are not originally from the department of Petén. They were born in Chiquimula, Escuintla, Zacapa, and Baja Verapaz, and have lived in Petén for anywhere between 2

and 28 years. Only one adult informant is originally from the municipality of Melchor de Mencos (Petén), and one child informant was born in the village of El Remate. All of them belong to the ladino-mestizo ethnic group.

Most of the people who work with wood are men, although several women also engage in this activity.

It is estimated that approximately 300 people living in El Remate and its surroundings work with wood.

The making of wooden objects in this area is relatively recent. The data provided indicates that it began about 8 years ago. All informants and members of the community agree that it was Mr. Rolando Soto who began this practice in 1987.

Mr. Soto states that canoes were the first objects he made. He says: "I was the first to make them. I'm not the best craftsman, that's for sure... but they turned out much better. It feels good when something goes through your hands and actually works." (Rolando Soto, 1995).

Currently, various objects are being made. Mr. Soto states that the ideas for the objects come from several people, who suggest new things and bring in models.

The informants state that through this work they contribute to forest conservation. Mr. Soto explains it as follows: "People used to burn precious woods, not because they enjoyed doing it, but because the only alternative they knew was planting corn. To plant corn, they need to clear the forest. Since they need it clean, they have to cut down all the trees to plant the corn. This work came as a blessing, because it started meeting all the needs that would arise later on, such as ecological concerns. So now, without realizing it, we are doing ecological work, even though we use wood. The difference is that the people who make handicrafts can live off one tree for a whole year; as farmers, they might cut down thousands for no reason. But with this, one tree lasts a year, and they earn twice as much as they used to." So, it has really turned out to be a blessing. For me, it couldn't be better..." (Rolando Soto, 1995).

Mr. Asunción Jiménez, originally from Escuintla and a recognized artist, believes that the authorities should value this work, as he states: "large areas of forest are no longer being cut down." (Asunción Jiménez, 1995).

Another interviewee, Mr. Benigno González, originally from Santa Cruz El Chol, Baja Verapaz, notes: "it helps

preserve nature; they no longer cut down 12 or 15 manzanas, only 1 manzana." (Benigno González, 1995).

Most of the informants are farmers, but currently the income from their woodwork provides them with the financial means to live. Mr. Rolando Soto, who works in a small workshop and distributes the products of other artists, states: "economically, I had never earned what I earn now. I earn by doing my work. Besides the percentage I get from selling, I earn my own income by working myself—because I enjoy doing it. Maybe I wouldn't even need to work anymore, I could just live off the percentages, but I like to work. So much so that I don't even handle the selling; my brothers take turns selling." (Rolando Soto, 1995).

Another informant, Maximiliano Guevara, originally from Zacapa, says: "when you're poor, you couldn't even cash a check; the checks are in the mountains, and yes... because since I started working, there have been orders where I got paid 400 or 500 in a check." (Maximiliano Guevara, 1995).

The informants believe that the work they do also fulfills spiritual needs and, specifically, artistic ones. Rolando Soto expresses it as

follows: "craftsmanship is not just a job, it's not just an alternative, it also has a double meaning, and we try to nurture that double meaning. It's the one that allows you to find a spiritual way of living too, because it becomes addictive—

you're working on something, and you can't put it down. They call you to come eat... and you put it down, but then you pick it right back up, because it sticks to you. So... it keeps you busy, and in the long run, it gives you something back."

(Rolando Soto, 1995).

Raw Materials:

To make wooden objects, most of which are decorative in nature, the artists and artisans use several precious woods from the department of Petén. They identify six types, which they obtain from the areas surrounding the village: mora (yellow), chicozapote, rosul, jobillo, cericote, and pije.

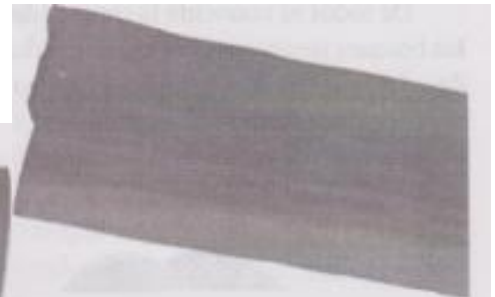
At other times, they use different types of wood, such

as hormigo, valerio, ramón, chechén negro, and tinto.

The informants state that they buy the wood either in pieces or as logs. Sometimes the wood is brought to their homes for sale; other times, they go to purchase it at a place called "El Lechugal," located 35 kilometers from El Remate.



Piece of "chicozapote" wood (photo by Jairo Cholito).



Piece of "jovillo" wood (**Astronium grabiolens**) (photo by Jairo Cholito).



Piece of "rosul" wood (**Dalbergia stvensoni**) (photo by Jairo Cholito).



Piece of "cericote" wood (**Cordia geracantus**) (photo by Jairo Cholito).



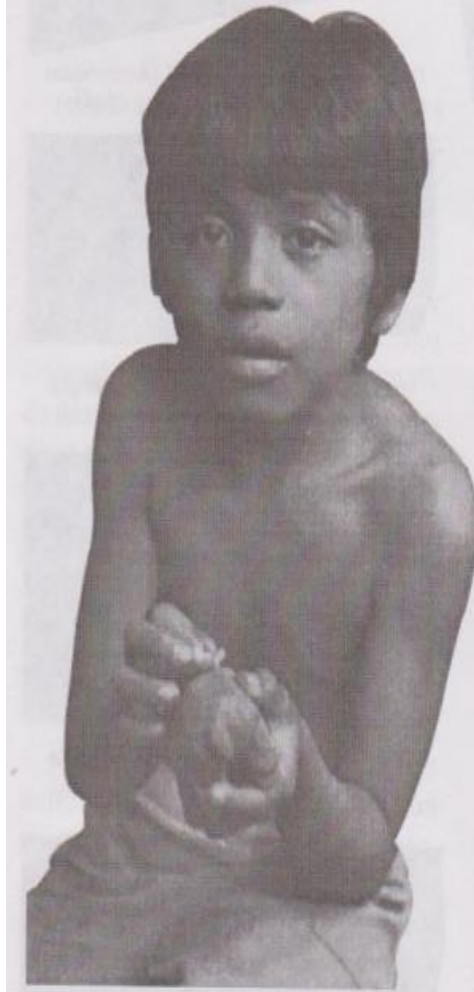
Piece of "pije" wood (photo by Jairo Cholito).



In the workshop run by Don Rolando Soto, his brothers and a few apprentices work.

The richness of the forests in Petén is well known. Considering its importance, I will cite some descriptions made by scholars and travelers who visited this department in the 19th century.

Arturo Morelet, a French naturalist, visited Petén in 1846. He arrived in Guatemala from Mexico, entering through Tabasco and following the course of the Usumacinta River. After visiting Yucatán,



The son of Doña Martina Ramírez and Don Maximiliano Guevara (both folk artists)

he ventured into Petén. He described the forest in the following way: "But here is the forest that stretches out to the horizon, its solitary immensity; sometimes flat, sometimes mountainous, broken by rocks or bathed by swamps; extending over a distance of eighty leagues, from the last huts of Tenosique to the uncultivated savannas of Petén." (Arturo Morelet, 1857, p. 140).

Later, Morelet describes: "We still encountered forest before reaching the end of our journey, but its appearance was no longer fearsome; interrupted by savannas, crossed by a wide open path, they were true woodlands, filled with birds, adorned with flowers, and perfumed with the

sweetest scents. Among them all, the vanilla stood out, its ripe pods decaying at the base of its stem... Finally, the shade of the forest disappeared completely; we were on the shores of a blue lake, its surface as brilliant as a mirror..." (Arturo Morelet, 1857, p. 157).

Presbyter Manuel Salvador González, in his *Memoirs on the Department of Petén*, writes: "...There, extremely strong woods for construction, fine woods of exquisite colors for art, aromatic, resinous, and a thousand other species for botany..." "...The mountains of Petén are clothed with massive cedars and mahoganies. In them grow the tough jabón, chaltemuchi,



The community shop managed by Mr. Rolando Soto.



The son of Doña Martina Ramírez and Don Maximiliano Guevara (both folk artists) carries out the "polishing" of the pieces.

chaltecoco, canté, ebony, granadillo, zapotillo, guayacán, palomarias, and many others, among which the palo tinta stands out. From it, the painter extracts vivid and unchanging colors—purple and velvet pink—and besides being of distinct grain and color, it is also highly valued for polishing..."

(*Geographic Dictionary of*



Doña Martina Ramírez does household chores, takes care of her children, and is also a folk artist.

Guatemala, Volume II, 1980, p. 968).

On May 1, 1893, an international exhibition was inaugurated in the city of Chicago, with the purpose of commemorating the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America. In Guatemala, to participate in that exposition, it was decided to highlight the products of Petén. The person appointed as Special Commissioner in charge of collecting materials from that area was the Frenchman Federico Arthés.

After completing his mission, Arthés wrote the *Brief Description of the Department of Petén* in 1893. In this work, Arthés describes, among other things, the forests of Petén:

"...The soil, composed of a deep layer of topsoil covered with thick deposits of humus, demonstrates its powerful fertility in the exuberant vegetation of the forests, which

occupy four-fifths of the territory. A great variety of valuable plant species abound in the jungles..." (Federico Arthés, 1893, p. 80).

Arthés describes the various types of wood produced in Petén. Below, I will transcribe what he says about chicozapote and jovillo, since these are two of the woods used in the creation of the folk art and crafts discussed in this article.

"Chicozapote is a compact, solid, and heavy wood, highly durable, red in color, and capable of a beautiful polish. In the ruins of Tikal, which are over three centuries old, pieces made of this wood with carved inscriptions are preserved in perfect condition. The milky sap of this tree, extracted by cutting into the bark and solidified through boiling, is the semi-elastic gum known as chicle, used in industry and highly valued. ...Jovillo is a cabinetmaking

wood, streaked with yellow and black, with a beautiful polish."

(Federico Arthés, 1893, p. 80).

Work System:

The work involved in making wooden objects is carried out, in most cases, within the family. Generally, all members of a family participate. In many cases, women and children are in charge of polishing the pieces.

Nevertheless, there is a workshop managed by Mr. Rolando Soto. In this workshop, Mr. Soto's brothers and father also work.

Rolando Soto was the first person to start this work, in



Salad spoons.



Wooden turtle.



Salad spoons.



María Elena Hernández (18 years old) is recognized in the community for the aesthetic quality of her work.



María Elena Hernández does not attend school because it has been preferred that her brothers attend instead.



In El Remate, several children work with wood.

The child-artists sell their products in shops and along the roadside.

1987. He and his family were the first to engage in this activity.

Apprentices usually children and adolescents come to this workshop to be taught how to make the pieces.

According to Mr. Soto, this workshop has produced master craftsmen.

Currently, eight people work in the workshop. It also serves as a place where objects made by other artists working from home are sold. A percentage from those sales is left to the workshop. It could be said that it is a kind of cooperative, for which a committee is being formed called the ARPETEN Artisan

Movement (Artisanal Eco-development of El Remate).

Mr. Soto, pointing out that he taught his father, his brothers, and other people in the community, states: "It hasn't been inherited, because there was no tradition. Now it is becoming the craft of Petén" (Rolando Soto, 1995).

Regarding the teaching of this craft, Mr. Soto notes that at the moment there are two people from Germany who are interested in learning, and they pay him for it. The course lasts one week. However, he emphasizes that despite this, he does not stop working.

In 1996, six individual shops and two community shops (one in addition to Mr. Soto's) were found in El Remate.



The boy Robinson Meléndez makes various wooden objects.

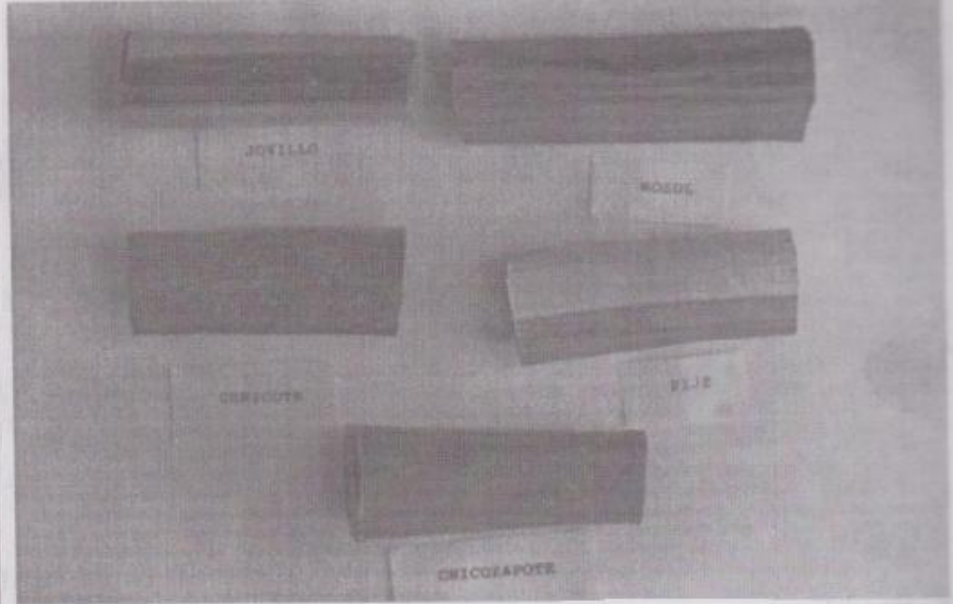


Hand saw, coping saw, and other work tools.

In one of the community shops, all the objects brought in by the artists are displayed and sold. In contrast, Mr. Soto's shop selects only those pieces that meet quality standards.

There is a shop that specializes in textiles from San Antonio Aguas Calientes, owned by Mrs. Vilma Hernández, who is originally from that town in the department of Sacatepéquez. In this shop, wooden objects brought by other artisans are sold, with a percentage retained from each sale.

In two of the community shops visited, the important role of women in the production of these objects could be observed. In one of them, at the home of Mrs.



Raw materials: jovillo, rosul, cericote, pije, chicozapote. (photo by Jairo Cholito).



Some wooden objects before being "polished".

Martina Ramírez, who not only crafts the pieces but also manages one of the two community shops, she also fulfills all the duties of a wife and mother. Her husband and children work in her household as well. The other noteworthy case is that of the young María

Elena Hernández Mejía (18 years old), who is recognized for the artistic quality of her work. Her father and brother work in agriculture. María Elena states that they make a living from her craft. Her mother also makes small canoes.



The artist Benigno González works not only with wood but also with bone and

María Elena creates a variety of items: lizards, armadillos, turtles, herons, ducks, spoons, etc. Many of these she sells by the dozen. She sells them to the PROPETEN shop located in the city of Flores.

As is the case in many families, María Elena does not attend school, as her brothers have been given the opportunity to do so instead.

During fieldwork in the village of El Remate, several children were interviewed to learn about their participation in this work and to understand how they perceive this art.



The artist Asunción Jiménez also creates Maya figures.

When asked if he talks about his work at school, the boy Robinson Meléndez replied that he does, but that no one listens to him the other children keep writing or playing. He said he told his teacher, but she forgot.

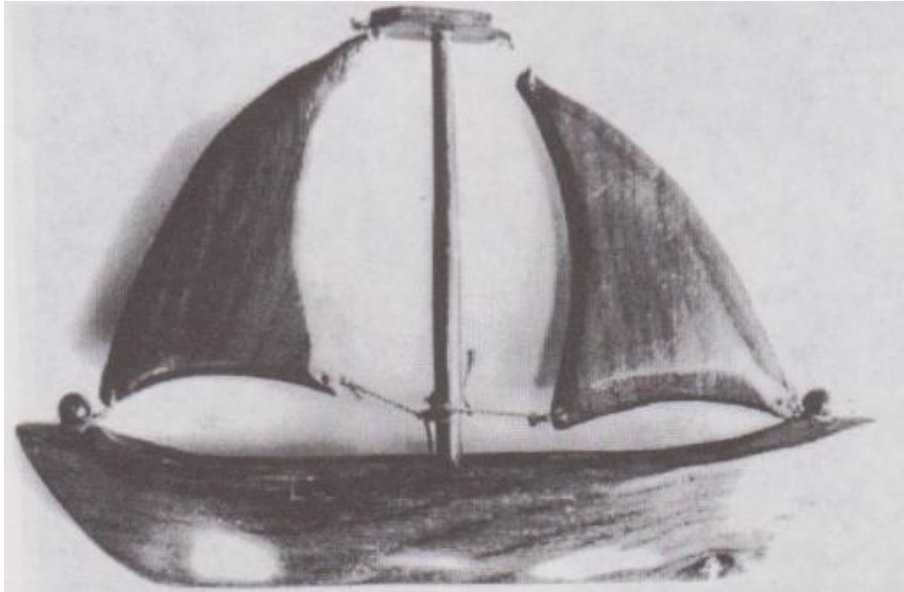
Work Instruments:

The tools used in the making of the objects are varied.

Mr. Soto explained that, at first, he used “chayes” made from glass bottles. Later, he



The objects sold in a community store.



Boat. (Photograph: Jairo Cholito).



"Shell" or "clam" (jewelry box).
(Photograph: Jairo Cholito).

experimented with different metal tools.

The tools mentioned include wood clamps, hand saws, school saws, gouges, chisels of various sizes, different types of rasps (oval-shaped), wire brushes, knives, engraving tools, sandpaper, machetes, knives, and flat or half-flat scrapers.

For the final finish, after hand-polishing with sandpaper, they use neutral-colored shoe polish. This helps preserve the original color of the wood.

Production Process:

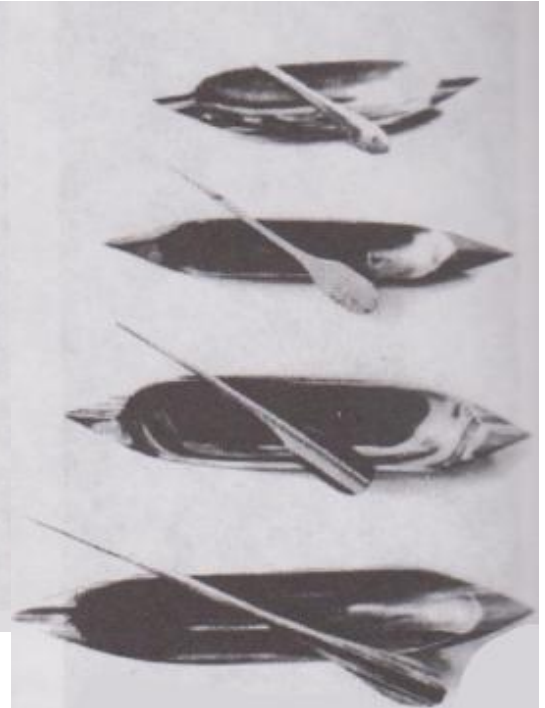
The informants explained that they begin by cutting pieces of wood to the size needed to craft the various items.

Then, using the cut pieces, they begin sculpting the desired form with different tools.

Once the wood has been shaped through various cuts, the next step is to polish the piece. This is done by hand, using different types of wood sandpaper.

Finally, when the piece has been sanded and has a shine, they apply neutral-colored shoe polish to preserve the wood's original shine and color.

In some shops, one can observe turned and pyroengraved wooden pieces.



Boats or canoes of various sizes.

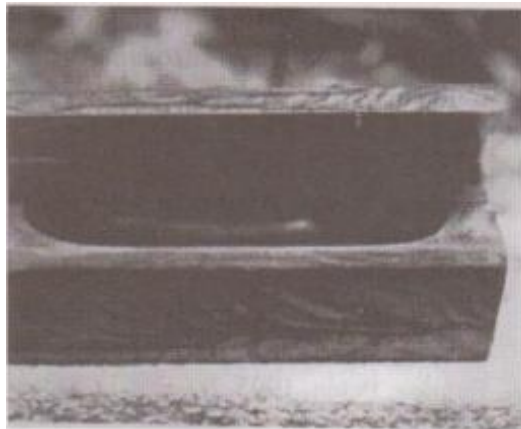
According to the informants, these are not made in El Remate they are brought from other places, particularly Santa Elena, where lathes and pyroengraving tools are used.

Mr. Soto, regarding manual work, states: "When machines come into play, the magic disappears. It's better as a business... but the magic that surrounds craftsmanship is something else... it's something important" (Rolando Soto, 1995).

Rolando Soto concludes by saying that he prefers to make individual pieces, not mass-produced ones.

Product:

The various objects, most of



Pirate chest, crafted by Mr. Rolando Soto.

them decorative in nature, include the following: animals native to Petén such as tapirs, dantas, armadillos (güeches), lizards, herons, frogs, snails, turtles, ducks, toucans; canoes or boats of various sizes, clams or shells, salad spoons, pirate chests, and trays.

Some of the interviewed artists create Maya figures (sculptures). Mr. Benigno González Hernández states that his work is inspired by William Coe's book and National Geographic magazines.

One of these sculptures can cost Q375.

The price of the items depends on their size, the type of wood used, the complexity of the work, and the quality of the finish.

Canoes or boats which are the most commonly produced items can cost between Q10 and Q50.



The interior of the community shop called "Center for Ecological Handicrafts."

Clams or shells are priced between Q20 and Q50.

Spoons range from Q35 to Q50.

Dantas cost between Q50 and Q70.

Some items, such as snails, needle ducks, jewelry box ducks, and chests, have a higher price. They can cost up to Q135 and Q200.

The prices of the other items described in previous paragraphs also vary.

The price of the items also depends on where they are sold: at the homes where they are made, in community shops, in shops in Flores (such as the one run by Propeten), in shops at the Santa Elena Airport, or whether they are sold by the dozen.

The interviewees indicate that smaller (lower-priced) items sell more.

In addition to the shops, it is common to see children along the roadside selling their products.

As with all forms of popular arts and crafts, "haggling" is allowed.

Distribution:

As previously mentioned, the wooden objects made in El Remate are distributed in a few places: artists' homes, community shops, stores in Flores, and shops at the Santa Elena Airport.

Buyers are primarily national and especially foreign tourists who visit the archaeological site of Tikal. As previously mentioned, the village of El Remate is located along the road leading to Tikal,

and the shops are situated along this same road.

Many of the tour guides who lead visitors to the archaeological site make a stop at the shops (especially the community-run one).

Despite this, the distribution of these wooden items is not widespread. Artists and artisans receive orders or commissions from other departments.

In some stores at the Craft Market in Guatemala City and at "La Aurora" International Airport, certain objects made in El Remate are sold especially canoes. Their prices are extremely high.

V- Conclusions and Recommendations:

As a conclusion, after conducting field research in the village of El Remate, it can be stated that the woodwork produced there can, in some cases, be conceptualized as *popular art*: particularly when it is carried out within the home and involves participation from members of the family. Consequently, its production is limited and restricted to the local market.

In the case of Mr. Rolando Soto's workshop, where apprentices who may also be classified as laborers are involved, this work is

categorized as *popular craft*. In this case, the production is higher, although its distribution does not significantly expand.

In both cases, the output is defined as *non-traditional popular art* and *non-traditional popular craft*.

The wooden objects made in El Remate require that the artists and artisans apply their imagination and creativity in carrying out their work. Since it is not bound to a tradition, this allows for the invention and creation of new items.

Although tree trunks are required, as indicated by the informants, tree felling is not excessive, as is often the case with agriculture.

Due to the high volume of tourism, most buyers who are foreigners pay the established prices (despite bargaining), which allows the artists and artisans to meet their economic needs and fulfill their spiritual and social ones as well.

This study has, therefore, explored a sample of non-traditional popular art and craft of high aesthetic quality, which could compete in the international market with similar products. These finely crafted objects have nothing to envy compared to popular creations made in other parts of Latin America, such as those from Honduras, Costa Rica,

Ecuador (Otavalo), and Colombia (Popayán), to name a few examples. Based on the observations made, both the art and craft of El Remate could become traditional if the folklorization process which some cultural expressions undergo takes place. Time and social acceptance will confirm this.

It is appropriate to note some general recommendations:

To the artists and artisans:

- Strengthen their organization.
- Join the National Association of Artisans.
- Explore other national and international markets.

To the authorities:

- Establish a national craft policy.
 - Create the National Institute of Arts, Crafts, and Popular Industries (Draft proposal by CEFOL).
 - Found a museum in the village of El Remate.
 - Provide loans for artists and artisans.
 - Encourage the creative work of other artists and artisans.
 - Promote the export of these wooden objects, ensuring fair payment to their creators.
 - Aim to eliminate "intermediaries."
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