

WIRE SHEPHERDS OF GUATEMALA CITY

*Italo Morales Hidalgo**

Photo by Manuel Guerra Caravantes

Mrs. Ana Dominga Gularte de Aguilera, a resident of the Bran Neighborhood of this capital, says that she has been doing Christmas shepherds since she was a child; perhaps she would have been ten years old when she started. "i learned this hobby from a cousin of my mom"" says Mrs. Aguilera, a native of San Miguel Chicaj, Baja Verapaz, she lived for a long time in several municipalities of the departments of Alta and Baja Verapaz, as well as in El Petén. He arrived in the capital about twenty-five years ago, where he has followed the tradition of making wire and cloth shepherds for his own nativity and to sell.

His work is not limited only to the making of shepherds; he also produces small ranches (whose roofs are covered with straw from the plain of the Salamá airfield); small shops; pines (wool or Maguey): goats (wool) and sets, such as: weddings, brotherhoods, processions; all these last are authentic reproductions of the same scenes carried out in San Miguel Chicaj. Each **pastor** (to use the generic term) he is about ten centimeters tall and is dressed in some indigenous costume from the Las Verapaces region. You can see figurines with costumes of Cobán, Tamahú, Tactic, Rabinal, Cubulco, San Miguel Chicaj. The authenticity achieved in the making of shepherds is such, that showing a couple of saleswomen dressed in Tamahú costumes, A. V., Doña Ana Dominga explained that one of the figurines was married and the other single.

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Easy to recognize: the married one wears the ribbon wrapped around her head and the single one wears it sole on her back.

Mrs. Ana Dominga produces 2,000 to 3,000 little shepherds a year, all in typical regional costumes, and sells them to Q. 4.00 a dozen. A procession with acolytes, banners, musicians, marimba, porters (from anda) and two Ladino women, sells it at the price of Q. 22.00 (According to Mrs. de Aguilera, only two ladinas are invited to participate in the processions of San Miguel Chicaj, which are the ones she reproduces: one who prays the rosary and the other who reads the novena). The weddings cost Q 15.00 and are authentic scenes of indigenous weddings.

Ms. de Aguilera's clientele consists of family friends and acquaintances: She tells us that, about three years ago, a friend living in Rome brought several hundred shepherds to make a Guatemalan nativity scene in the Italian capital.

In the elaboration of the shepherds, Doña Ana Dominga first lines the wire with paper **Kraft**, "which is the most boring part" the lady remarks. Immediately and independently, he makes all the little heads, paints the little faces and adorns them "as it should be". Then he cuts the wire to make the bodies; he attaches them to the little heads, dresses them and fixes them.

He starts working in February, already after all the post-Christmas activity has calmed down, and continues throughout the year.

The nativity scene that Doña Ana Dominga has been making for more than thirty years, is composed only of shepherds made by herself and depicts typical scenes of the region where she was raised, such as markets, processions, weddings and brotherhoods, especially in the villages of Rabinal and San Miguel Chicaj, Baja Verapaz.

The traditional moss is brought from Salamá: and even "chutes" (ixcanal thorns) is used to glue the **embrellados**, because "the pins don't hold". She adorns the surroundings of the nativity scene with lustre paper breaklets of different colors and glues them with wax, she forms breaklets because in the verapaces that flower abounds.

Mrs. Aguilera begins to lift the birth on December 15" "little by little". First he arranges the sky with silver paper stars, glues the clouds (the ones he really likes to place, and hangs the traditional bombs. This is how Doña Ana Dominga began to make an authentic relic of our tradition, already very come to less and even ignored in our days.

“I don't put snow because it doesn't snow in Guatemala,” he says, so conscious is he of keeping this tradition alive. Our folk artist confessed that, this year, she is going to make more shepherds than usual. Unfortunately, none of his descendants decided to learn this almost forgotten art.



Ana Dominga Gularte de Aguilera, elaborates wire shepherds. Guatemala City. (*photo by Hítalo Morales Idalgo*).



The craftswoman lines the wires with paper **Kraft**, as a preliminary step to the elaboration of the shepherds. (*photo by Hítalo Morales Idalgo*).



Wire Shepherds. They represent a couple of indigenous people in ceremonial costumes.



Native-born pastors representing indigenous vendors. Their costumes are ceremonial.



Wire shepherd. It depicts an indigenous woman in traditional Alta Verapaz costume.