



# Aid to Artisans

Spring 2017

**Join the 2017 MRP**

**ATA Strengthens Yucatan's Artisanal Value Chain**

**Nicaragua Preps for Design Innovation**

**Indigo Lion Global Handmade: Connects, Creates, and Curates**

# Join the 2017 MRP



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Individual  
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**#HandmadeIsModern**

With artisan Jaime Equihua, Guillermo Jester is co-owner of [PATAKUA](#) and a successful alumnus of the 2014 Market Readiness Program. Working with artisans in Michoacan, Mexico, Guillermo uses original, cutting edge designs, selecting colors and textiles attractive to the western retail market. Do you want your organization to have success like PATAKUA? Would you like to learn to differentiate your brand and products from your competitors using best practices in design and product development? Join us for the [2017 Market Readiness Program](#) from August 19-23, 2017!

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# ATA Strengthens Yucatan's Artisanal Value Chain



The month of April ushered in ATA's new initiative in the Mexican states of Quintana Roo, Yucatan and Campeche, implementing a complete diagnostic of the artisan value chain in the Yucatan Peninsula. Funded by the W. K. Kellogg foundation (WKKF), ATA is addressing the problem of poverty amongst the indigenous population, with a core focus on enhancing the craft industry. It aims to identify and understand factors impacting the artisanal value chain in the production of handcrafts and artisanal specialty foods.



The ATA Mexico team is evaluating the artisanal sector by analyzing the limitations in local supply of raw materials, the gaps in availability of commercial services and the needs for responding to market demand. ATA's goal in this project is understanding the artisans' skills and business organizations, so we can bring them to sustainable growth.





ATA launched the initiative by creating alliances with local partners, to promote the goal of improving living and working conditions of Mayan artisans. “Crafts of each region will be examined for their aesthetic appeal, cultural roots and market potential. We will include textile weaving and embroidery, hammocks made of yarns of Sanseveria plant, wood, plant fibers and ceramics”, says Monika Steinberger, ATA’s Director of Program Management and Development

In addition to preserving cultural heritage, the ATA Mexico team will explore adding value to the artisanal foods produced in the Yucatan Peninsula. This effort, a first for ATA, will find ways to transform local handcrafted foods into export-quality products for the tourism and global markets.

# Nicaragua Preps for Design Innovation





ATA expanded its reach into Nicaragua this Spring by participating in Reto Diseño (RD), initiated and executed by [Manos Nicas](#) (MN) a Nicaraguan artisan enterprise. MN is a growing network of craft stores and a non-profit division dedicated to human development, gender issues and business training. RD, the first event of this kind in Nicaragua, was led by MN owners Franklin Sanchez and Ingrid Soza, graduates of ATA's signature Market Readiness Program™. The event launched a discussion on how to revitalize design in Nicaragua, making artisan work relevant to local markets and expand into the global arena.



Our evaluation of the Nicaraguan artisan sector revealed significant market potential in pottery, basketry, carved wood and stone, horn jewelry, and the MN signature product of cornhusk paintings and notecards. However, our rapid assessment also revealed a lack of market-based design innovation, lack of an indigenous textile tradition, and an absence of buyer linkages beyond the local market.

“While there is local expertise in several craft techniques, the motifs in use do not express specifically Nicaraguan cultural heritage” states Monika Steinberger, ATA’s Director of Program management and Development. ATA’s design development workshops will help articulate a local Nicaraguan aesthetic, based on pre-colonial history and culture.





ATA designer Daniela Viscarra, who will lead the workshop in July, is looking forward to training MN designers and artisans to develop a specific Nicaraguan cultural identity for the organization. This cultural identity will be expressed in innovative design. The workshop will also identify sales strategies for the organization and guide it on a path towards becoming a social enterprise. Viscarra adds, "The new designs will be developed based on cultural history. We will revive ancient motifs, using traditional craft media, with the goal to generate new collections that are representative, unique and tell a story."

Franklin Sanchez, founder of MN, is enthusiastic about the upcoming design workshop, "The ATA specialists have knowledge of the market. This will help us to focus on the changes appropriate for the market. They will also help us to better understand and implement quality control". In addition to their cornhusk paintings, MN wants to add new products in their stores. "Combining different raw materials to create new products adds enormous value", adds Sanchez. MN's leadership is determined to make MN a leader in the domestic market and eventually export to international markets.



Sanchez holds Nicaraguan artisans in great esteem and has a grand vision for their development. “Artisans are our partners in this business and they are an integral part of our network. Through the business partnership with MN, they can market their products at a fair price and sell more so that their families can meet their needs and have a better life”.

We wish MN and Nicaraguan artisans the very best in the upcoming design innovation workshops that will help introduce Nicaragua’s untapped cultural heritage globally.



Sanchez values Nicaraguan artisans with great esteem and has a grand vision for their development. “Artisans are our partners in this business, they integrate our network as independent entrepreneurs, so they can market their products at a fair price with the hope that they would sell more and their families could meet their needs and have a better life”.

# Indigo Lion Global Handmade: Connects, Creates, and Curates

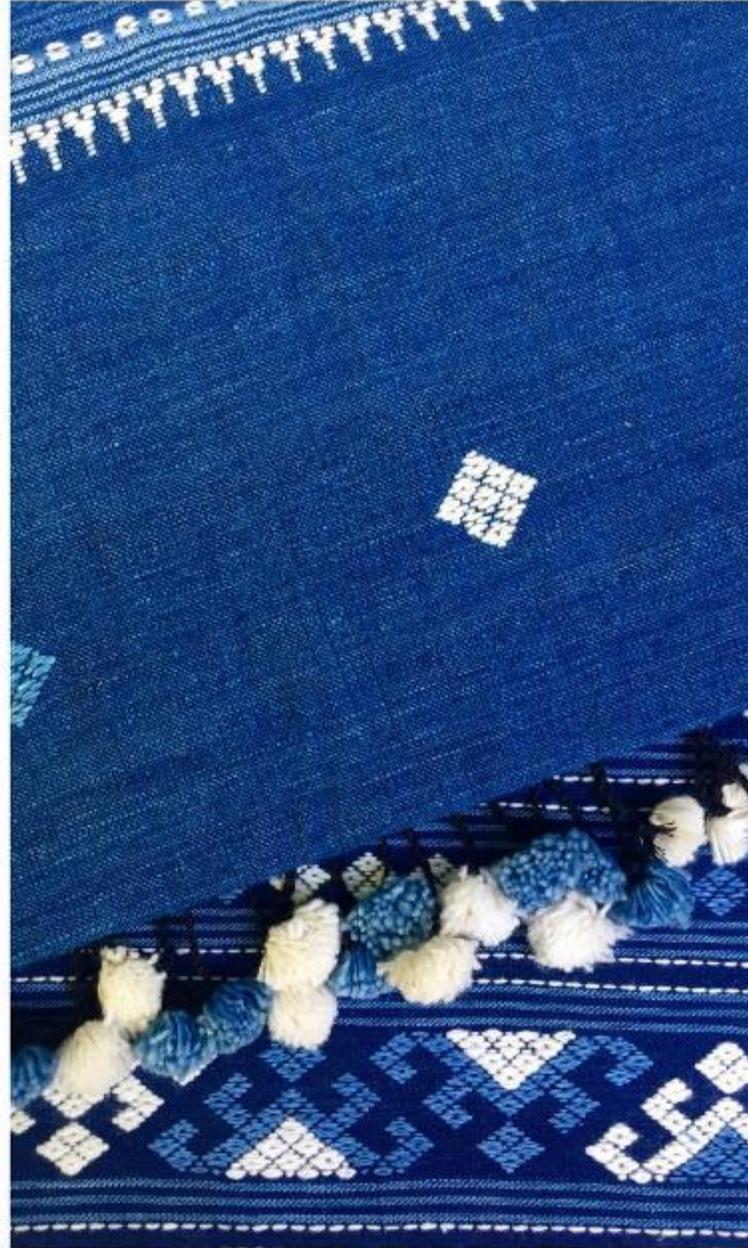




The beauty of handmade is enhanced when it reflects the story, culture and craft behind it. 2015 MRP alumni Mary Louise Marino is quick to recognize the pivotal role of global artisans and their handmade labor of love by bringing them to the forefront. Having lived overseas and been fascinated by traditional crafted objects, Mary Louise is a messenger for the beauty in other cultures.



“Handmade craft in particular offered a glimpse into ritual and daily life. Craft peaked my curiosity, as I wondered how it was made and about the artisan who made it. Letting my imagination wander, I could sense the energy expressed from her hands and heart as it was created” says Mary Louise. Her vision of connecting artisans and sharing their creativity with the world came to fruition in her newly launched social enterprise, [Indigo Lion Global Handmade](#). Carrying unique and meaningful textile accessories and home accents sourced ethically from Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, Mary Louise has her heart set on sharing the life, culture and stories of artisans, curating art and creating beautiful conversations that ensue when we hold handmade objects in our hands.



Indigo Lion's crafts are made with local cotton and silk, hand-spun, natural hand-dyed and hand-woven textiles from traditional ethnic groups. Indigo Lion follows fair trade principles and sustainable practices, environmentally conscious production, respect based on women's empowerment and improving livelihoods while maintaining cultural integrity. "We learn and share about the artisans' lives and stories, their village and culture and understand more about the materials and processes used in creating handmade products", says Mary Louise.



Reminiscing about her trip to Laos, Mary Louise expresses her dream of promoting this textile art. “They are an intimate glimpse into Lao culture, both traditional and present, bringing me close to the life in a village, close to women, nature, and expression. Extraordinary textiles with motifs and patterns emerge out of unique weaving traditions. Indigenous plants and the soil underfoot yield subtle natural colors and textures”.





With many beautiful patterns and unique creations that are yet to be introduced to the U.S. market, ATA hopes Indigo Lion Global Handmade continues to connect artisans to global handmade from the East to the West, carrying with it, a part of their culture and creativity to inspire artisans and patrons worldwide.



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**Aid to Artisans**