



"Muxá (sheep's wool in the Wixárika language) is a material that has been part of Wixárika culture for generations, from the first offerings given at sacred sites to accessories like bags. This element, Muxá, has always been present."
- Juan Aurelio Carrillo Ríos

Crafting with heritage knowledge

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The Tsik+ri is a textile craft from the Indigenous Wixárika people of central and eastern Mexico; it embodies a unique fusion of spiritual values, tradition, and heritage (Hernández Cervantes, 2025). Cervantes learned the technique in a non-ritualistic context, leading her to develop and pilot workshops to promote the value of this craft tradition in international contexts. The aim of these workshops was to reconfigure educational workshops using local wool and to foster collaborative community learning (Hernández Cervantes, 2025).

As a result, Cervantes had the opportunity to collaborate closely with an Indigenous master artist from Mexico, Juan Aurelio Carrillo, from the University of Nayarit. Together, they held a *Tsik+ri*

workshop during the autumn of 2024 at the University of the Arts Helsinki, *Taideyliopisto galleria*, in the context of the exhibition *Taking Back the Museum*, co-funded by the Kone Foundation. The collaboration was also supported by the Embassy of Mexico in Finland (Figure 1).

The two-part workshop was adapted for Nordic European audiences to introduce the traditional *Wixárika* heritage craft and the use of locally sourced, naturally dyed Finnish wool. In the workshop, Cervantes, from the VillaInno team, presented wool dyed with Mexican plants and pigments such as corn, cochineal, *palo de campeche*, avocado, and beans; Carrillo presented the technique and background of the *Tsik+ri* pieces (Figure 2).

The aim and objective of this workshop were to provide people with access to more ecocentric practices, such as crafting with naturally dyed wool. In addition, the aim was to spread knowledge of Indigenous cultures through craft workshops, which is an attempt to include, respect, and embrace polycentric and pluralistic practices.

◀◀ **FIGURE 1.** Participants in the Tsik+ri workshop at the University of the Arts Helsinki. Photograph: Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.

◀ **FIGURE 2.** Naturally dyed samples from Mexican native plants were used in the workshop and colour palette. Photograph: Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.

▶ **FIGURE 3.** Collaborative work between the Villalnoo-project and master crafter Juan Aurelio Carrillo Ríos from the Nayarit University with a woven sample in the workshop. Photographs: Juan Aurelio Carrillo and Fabiola Hernández Cervantes, 2024.



▶ **FIGURE 4.** Participants practising the technique to create a Tsik+ri piece. Photographs: Olivia Rodríguez, 2024.



During the workshop, in addition to sharing the technique for making a Tsik+ri and showcasing the materials to a diverse audience, it is important to note that knowledge beyond the material is also transmitted. This includes the strong relationship Wixárika culture has with animals and plants, knowledge that contributes to a deeper understanding of nature and the universe.” - Juan Aurelio Carrillo Ríos

The inspiration for this collaboration emerged from the designer’s need to provide respectfully devised solutions to address current social, cultural, and environmental issues; the epistemologies and practices of Indigenous peoples, such as the Wixárika people, present potential for hosting contemporary craft and design spaces where people can learn from wool, natural dyes, traditional pigments and heritage knowledge in a respectful way.

The design development included the online and in-situ phases. First, discussions with the master artisan were held via online sessions to brainstorm possible outcomes of the workshop. In these sessions, both the crafter and the designer agreed on the knowledge and materials to provide to the participants. The second part of the collaboration included in-situ practice, in which the artisan demonstrated the technique to the participants and the designer presented the wool materials, encouraging discussion about working with locally sourced, naturally dyed wool, using traditionally available native Mexican pigments (Figure 3).

The materials provided were the following: wooden sticks, naturally dyed wool, a sample palette, a basket with colours dyed in previous sessions, and printed instructions for the participants.

The outcome was a series of personal woven mandalas made by each participant; among them were Mexican people living in Finland, Wixárika crafters, researchers from the University of Lapland and the University of the Arts Helsinki, participants from the Embassy of Mexico in Finland, and the general public (Figure 4).

References

Hernández Cervantes, F. (2025). Weaving wisdom: Community learning through wool crafts. *RUUKKU Taiteellisen tutkimuksen kausijulkaisu*, (22). <https://doi.org/10.225 01/ruu.2410897>