



EDDIE MOORE/JOURNAL

A straw applique of a Rio Grande Vallero blanket by Della Ulibarri.

# MARKET NICHE

*Applique 'weavings'  
a unique addition  
to Spanish Market*

By KATHALEEN ROBERTS  
Journal Staff Writer

**A**s Della Ulibarri pieces together shards of straw into her mosaic "weavings," she sometimes gazes at the Rio Grande rug hanging in her living room.

Dating to the 1890s, the 83-by-54-inch color-drenched textile is the handspun work of her great-great grandmother. Ulibarri turned to the family treasure as inspiration for her own straw applique, forming straw inlay with a geometry that

blooms into plaqued weavings of diamonds and stars.

Ulibarri has developed her own hybrid niche by combining the two crafts, said Bud Redding, the director of Spanish Market.

"I did not see any other artist in Spanish Market that had achieved that," he said. "It's a great example of invention within the tradition and exciting to see."

The Truchas native is one of 200 local artists showing her work at the 59th Annual Traditional Spanish Market, the oldest and largest exhibition of

## If you go

**WHAT:** 59th Annual Traditional Spanish Market

**WHERE:** Santa Fe Plaza

**WHEN:** Today-Sunday

6-9 p.m. Friday, Spanish Market Preview, Santa Fe Community Convention Center, 201 W. Marcy St., Spanish Colonial Arts Society members only.

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Spanish Market

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, Spanish Market

**CONTACT:** 982-2226 or [info@spanishcolonial.org](mailto:info@spanishcolonial.org)

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# Applique Weavings Stand Out

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Spanish colonial art forms in the U.S., on the Plaza this Saturday and Sunday. The market includes santos, hide paintings, straw applique, textiles, furniture, colcha embroidery, tinwork, ironwork, precious metals, pottery, bonework, ramilletes (decorative paper garlands) and basketry, as well as traditional food, live music and dance.

Straw applique developed in northern New Mexico villages during the 1700s when churches and homes needed crosses. In a hybrid of inlay and veneer, artists spun straw into gold by splitting and flattening the fiber, then slicing it into jigsaw pieces as small as a grain of rice. Some historians have called it "poor man's gold."

The eight-pointed star pattern found in straw applique evolved from Rio Grande weavings in the mid-to-late 1800s. This early art form nearly died out in the early 20th century. The Works Progress Administration and Eliseo and Paula Rodriguez rescued straw applique from oblivion in the 1930s, and its rebirth was fueled by a revived Spanish Market in 1965.

Ulibarri works at a table in her sun-drenched living room, often saying a prayer while she works, surrounded by plastic bags of plain and multicolored straw. A straw applique chandelier that took Best in Show at the Santa Fe County Fair dangles above

her; furniture crafted by her father stands nearby. She works without a pattern, sometimes inspired by books on Rio Grande weaving. Stars, diagonal lines and chevrons vine across her crosses and plaques. She says it all started when she, her mother and father signed up for a Santa Fe Community College class on the technique. The meticulous work felt natural to her. What began as an occasional hobby created for gifts and school auctions ballooned into a passion.

Ulibarri began selling her work at a Santuario de Chimayó craft fair five years ago. This marks her third year at Spanish Market.

"I just always liked it," she explained. "It's supposed to represent gold and it just sort of pops."

"Sometimes I don't do it for months and then I pick it up," she said. "What really pushes me is the deadlines."

The artist usually brings about 40 pieces to sell at markets and fairs. Her work encompasses plaques, crosses and Christmas ornaments.

"Since my birth I've been a practicing Catholic," she said. "I like the crosses and the crucifixes."

She's often inspired by her two grown children and her godchildren as she works.

"I sit there and pray and meditate and then I start doing things," she continued. "I read once that faith and fear do not go together, so I just say, 'They're in your hands.'"



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**Della Ulibarri works on a straw applique crucifix at her Santa Fe home.**



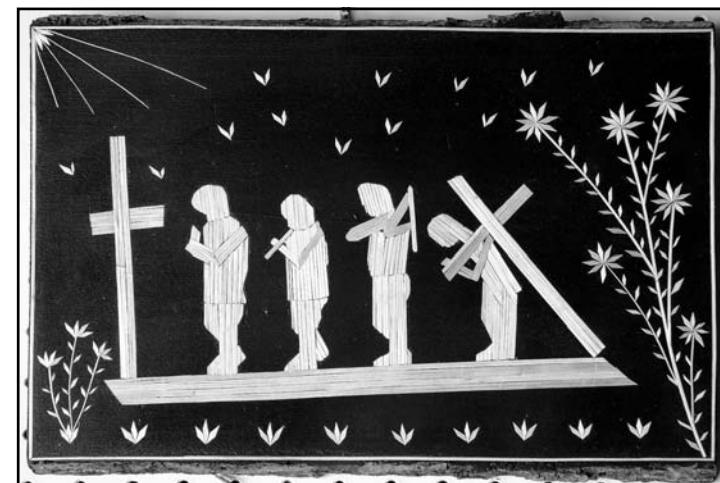
**A straw applique crucifix by Della Ulibarri.**

An academic affairs assistant at the Santa Fe Institute for 22 years, she says the artwork helps her wind down at the end of the day.

First she paints the pieces black, then slices a piece of straw lengthwise with an X-Acto knife. She flattens the straw, then pours a spot of wood glue onto a discarded advertising postcard rescued

from the trash. She runs her glue-coated fingers over the straw to saturate it, a cloth bunched in her lap to wipe her sticky fingers and rub off the excess. She cuts the thin strand into tiny shapes, then lifts them to their wooden canvas with the knife blade.

"I just eyeball it," she said. "I use a lot of diamonds. I've done Chimayó weavings, Rio



**A straw applique of Penitentes Hermanos by Della Ulibarri.**

Grande, the Saltillo style."

A cousin encouraged her to expand from natural into multicolored straw because she wanted a piece. Ulibarri also designed a matchbox auctioned for the Presbyterian Medical Services Fund in December; it sat next to pieces crafted by actors Wes Studi and Ali MacGraw,

as well as numerous local artists.

"It was the second-highest bid," she said proudly.

When she sells a piece, she often writes a check to her godchildren. The giving is a way to give thanks.

"This is a blessing to me, so I like to share a little bit."