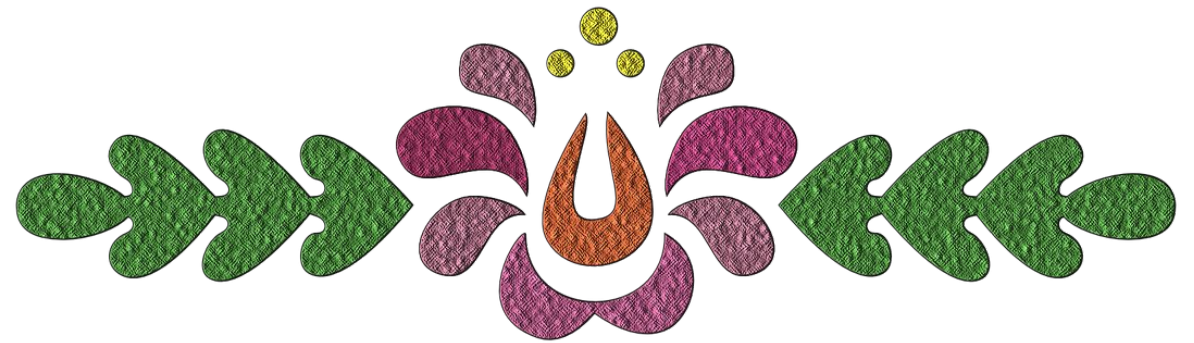


# Arte Popular from Mexico:

Candles, Lacquer, Alebrijes





# What is arte popular?

Arte Popular is a Spanish term that translates to Popular Art in English. Another word for Arte Popular is *artesanias*. These can be arts like paintings and pottery, but they also include food, dance, and clothes.

These arts are unique to Mexico and the communities that live in it.

After the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s, focus was turned to Native Amerindian and farming communities. These communities were creating works of art but they had been ignored. But, after the revolution, Mexico needed something that could unite the people of Mexico.

They decided to use the traditional arts of its people. Arte popular/artesanias became the heart of Mexico.

You can go to Mexico now and visit artists' workshops and see how they create their beautiful art.



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Arte popular/artesanas are traditions of many years within their communities. It is this community aspect that has provided Mexico with an art that focuses on the everyday people. It is why the word 'popular' is used to label these kinds of arts.

The amazing objects they create, whether it is ceramic bowls or painted chests, are all unique and specific to the communities

This is why there is so much variety in Mexico, because it is a large country. The artesanas found by the coast are different from the artesanas that you can find in Mexico's desert or mountains.

For example, some communities use bark paper from specific trees. This is called amate paper and it is used for painting.

Some communities create dolls out of palm tree leaves. The leaves are dried and then weaved to make dolls, hats, and baskets.



# Candles as Arte Popular

Another kind of arte popular are candles, they are called velas escamadas. Velas escamadas are candles that have been shaped into intricate designs. Velas means candles and escamada means to flake off, which refers to the shaping of the candles.

You might be thinking to yourself, how can candles be art? After all, we can go to the store and buy a packet of candles.

These candles are shaped into all kinds of figures. This photograph on the left is an example of velas escamadas.

We can see that the wax has been dyed different colors. There is red, orange, yellow, white, and some green. The wax has been shaped into large, circular shapes that look like flowers. These also have one green piece that looks like a leaf attached to them. There are also smaller, cup like flowers that are arranged into circles. If you look closely, you can see the tall, white candle in the center of all the colorful flowers. All of this, is made out of wax.





How are these candles made?

The wax is melted down in water. The water will keep the wax from burning and completely melting away. After all, when you light a candle, it melts away and leaves nothing behind.

This is also how the wax gets its color. If they want the wax to turn orange, they will add the paint into the water. This is how we see all the different wax colors like orange, red, blue and many more.

Once the wax is melted in the water, it is either left to dry for a later use or it is poured into molds.

All the flowers, or birds, or other wax figures you see are created with molds.

The artists will then glue all the small wax sculptures together and onto the main, single candle that you can see in the center.





# Lacquer



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Another popular artesanía is the Lacquer.

Lacquer is a type of varnish, so once you are done painting, you put a varnish on it to make it glossy.

Artists paint boxes, plates and other wooden things in many different colors. After they are painted, they are varnished which make the objects shiny.

You can find lacquer art in the states of Sinaloa, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Yucatan.

In the photograph, you can see the different colors that are used to paint wooden objects. You can also see the different objects that are painted, like chests and plates.

These are specifically called Olinala Lacquer, because they are made in the town of Olinala, in the state of Guerrero.



In the photograph we see one of the boxes up close. We can make out that these are not only painted but they have also been carved.

To make these, the wood is made into whatever they want like a box or toy. Once the wood is ready, it is painted in one color and left to dry. In the photograph we can see this box was first painted in a dark blue.

Then, the artists begins to paint all the details. They must be very careful and wait for each different color to dry to keep the paints from mixing.

You can imagine this takes a long while to finish. But in the end, they have this beautiful work of art.



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# Alebrijes



The alebrijes share the colorfulness of the candles and the lacquer boxes.

The alebrijes, come in all shapes and sizes. They can look like animals we see in nature or they can look like nothing we have ever seen.

The history of alebrijes begins with Pedro Linares. He was an artist that sculpted things out of paper-mache.

In the 1930s, Pedro Linares fell sick which made him stay in bed for days. During his sleep, he dreamt of fantastical creatures. They looked like nothing he had ever seen. These creatures were shouting at him, “Alebrijes! Aalebrijes!”

Thankfully, Pedro Linares got better and was able to go back to work. He began to make out of paper, all those strange creatures he saw in his dreams. The word from his dreams, “alebrije”, became the name of these funky little sculptures.

The family, Linares, continues to create alebrijes even to this day!



# Traditional: Paper-Mache

The traditional way of making alebrijes is with paper.

The paper-mache has two different forms.

1. Paper strips glued together with some type of glue
2. Paper boiled in water with a type of glue to create a pulp mixture

With the first type, one usually starts with a wire form which is then covered in paper.

For the second type, you usually shape it into whatever shape you want the alebrije to have. Think of it like clay.



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# New Traditions: Wood



There are more recent traditions that have alebrijes made out of wood.

There is no paper involved with these. Instead, the alebrije is carved out of wood and then painted in bright colors.

The wood alebrijes have become more popular than the paper-mache ones.



# Alebrije Parade in Mexico City



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The alebrijes have become so popular that there is actually a parade that happens in Mexico City.

The parade takes place in October, and it is almost like a preparation before Mexico's celebration of Dia de Los Muertos. The holiday is a day where we remember our loved ones who have passed away.

The parade takes over the center of Mexico city. The alebrijes are huge and are placed on carts of some kind. They are then pulled down the streets. People from all over Mexico come to the parade to see the fantastical creatures.





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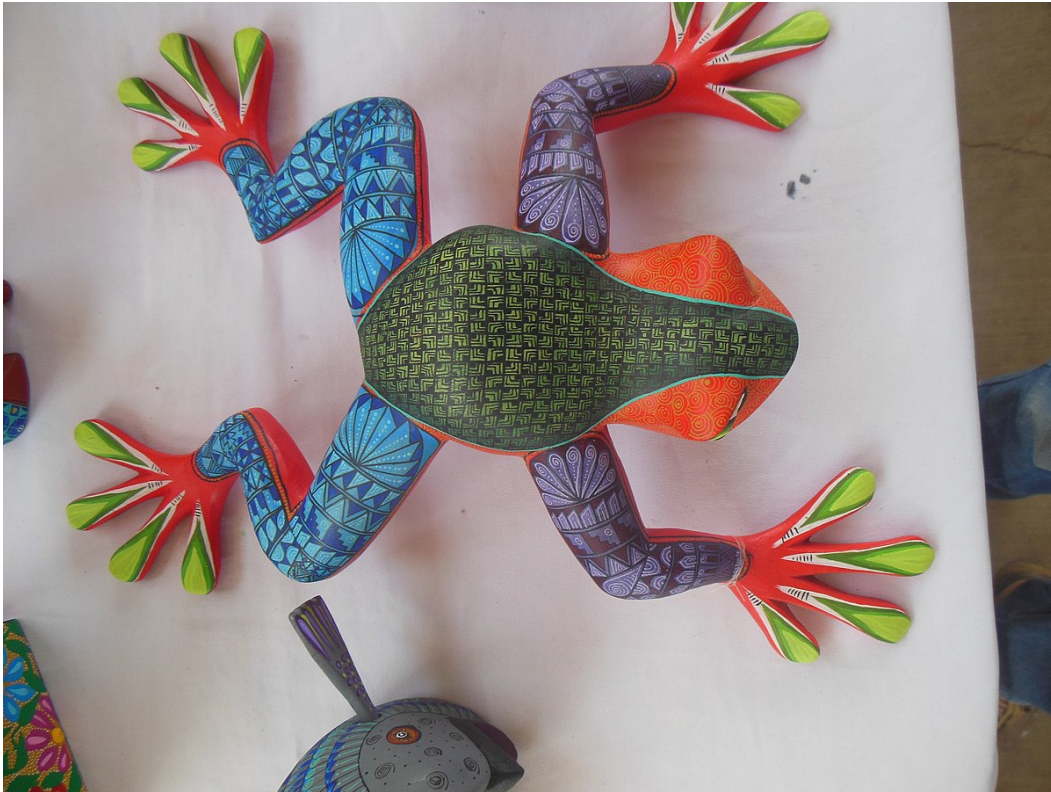


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Examples  
of Parade  
Floats



# Examples of different kinds of Alebrijes

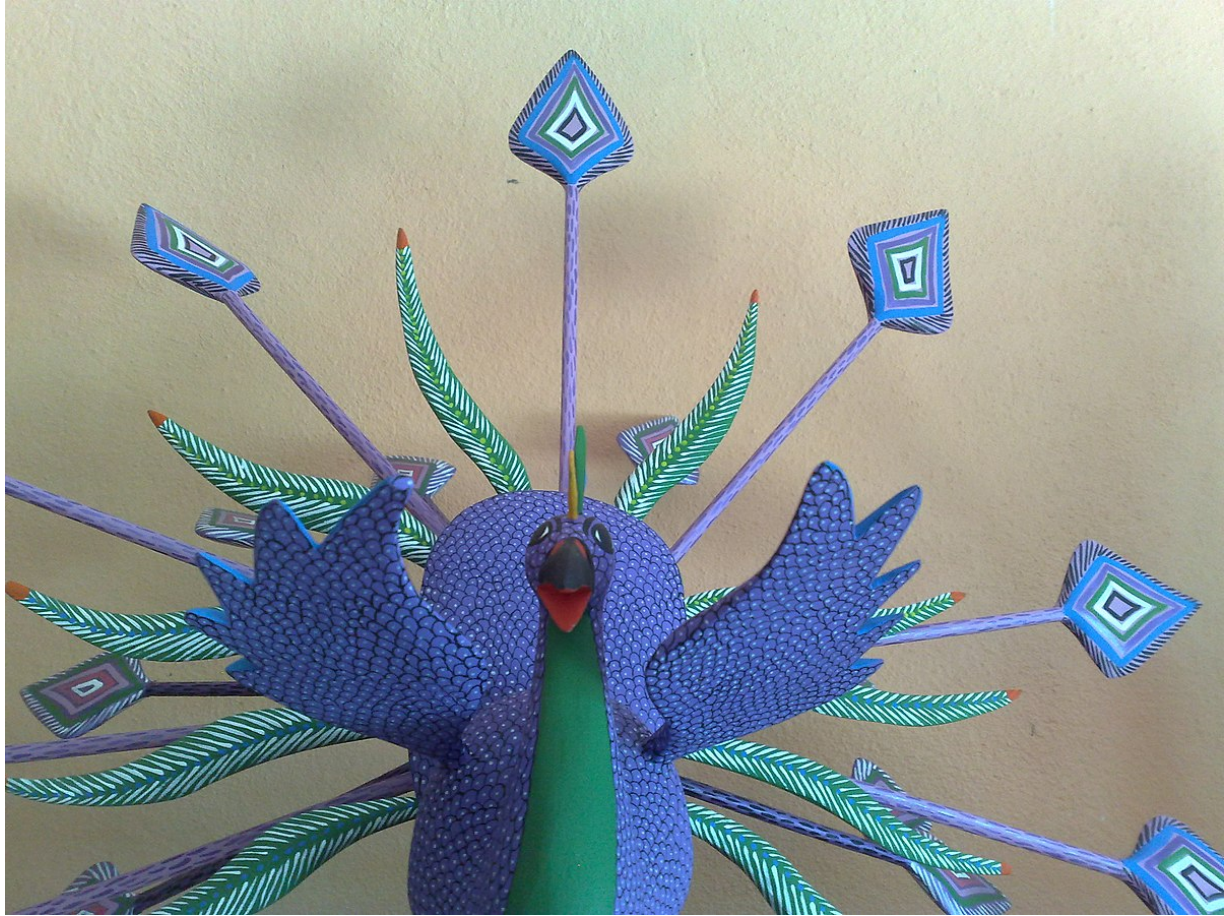


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Use the activity book, *Arte Popular: Alebrijes*, and instructions to create your own Alebrije out of paper-mache.