

# Appliqué as therapy

## Spanish Market artist teaches traditional craft

By Ana Maria Trujillo | The New Mexican

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Photo by: [Natalie Guillén](#)/The New Mexican

Culture, faith and tradition are very important to Spanish Market artist Della Vigil Ulibarri, who grew up in a Catholic family in Truchas.

"My religion was instilled in me since birth," Vigil Ulibarri said. When times are tough, or she's worried about her two children, she turns to her straw appliqué projects and prays as she works.

"It's very therapeutic," Vigil Ulibarri said of her colorful, interesting work, which she does in the dining room of her Santa Fe home.

There are a few spots open in her Saturday straw appliqué workshop at the Museum of Spanish Colonial Arts. The workshop is part of a series of workshops with traditional Spanish Market Artists sponsored by the Spanish Colonial Arts Society.

The workshops are popular, said the society's executive director Donna Pedace.

"These are the traditional art forms of New Mexico and a lot of people, whether they're local residents or people who have recently moved into the area, have an interest in learning," Pedace said. "With the workshops, they not only get the how to, but some of the history and the culture significant to the art form."

Pedace said the workshops usually feature a variety of seasoned and new artists to "give people a good cross section," Pedace said.

"(Vigil Ulibarri) does lovely work," Pedace said. "She's one of our newer market artists."

Though Vigil Ulibarri comes from a creative family (her grandmothers were weavers and her father is an artisan who builds many things, including furniture), she didn't learn to do straw appliqué until

2002, when her friend Becky Seligman taught her. Vigil Ulibarri, who works full time at the Santa Fe Institute, had signed up to take a straw appliqué course at Santa Fe Community College, but the class was canceled.

"That's when my friend Becky said, 'Oh, I can teach you,' " Vigil Ulibarri said, adding that she took along her parents and her daughter, Felice Ulibarri, to learn from Seligman. "We all made a piece."

Vigil Ulibarri's first piece was based on a 125-year-old wedding blanket her great-great-grandmother, Martina Montoya, wove with her four sisters.

"They raised the sheep and they sheared the sheep and they would till the wool," Vigil Ulibarri explained, adding that the women were from El Valle and the blankets they wove were called "Valleros."

"The tradition back then is they would give their daughter a wedding blanket. (Montoya) wove this blanket for her daughter; then she gave it to her daughter, my grandmother."

The wedding blanket then went to her father, since he was an only child, and finally to Vigil Ulibarri. The blanket that has been passed down five generations was the inspiration for her first straw appliqué piece, which looks like a Vallero blanket.

Vigil Ulibarri started doing straw appliqué pieces to donate to auctions for St. Michael's High School, or she'd create a piece for the a craft show at the Santuario de Chimayó. She uses bright colors in her pieces, which are mostly crosses and works based on Vallero blankets. Three years ago, she decided to enter the Spanish Market.

Her workshop is open to everyone of any level, she said. It costs \$50 for Spanish Colonial Arts Society members and \$75 for nonmembers. To register, call 982-2226.

"Each workshop is a piece of New Mexico history and culture," Pedace said. "People seem to have a great deal of fun for each one. In addition to learning, it's a wonderful opportunity to meet others who are interested and get to know one of our market artists."

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