

Wild silk, a hidden treasure

The Video

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Video: [Wild silk, a hidden treasure](#)



Figure 1: Wild silk-producing moth and its cocoons after collection, placed on wires © Martina Cassiau/ Memória Imaterial edition

Synopsis: *“Wild silk, hidden treasure”* is a project that revives the artisanal spinning and weaving technique of the *“coyoyo”*, a wild silk from the valleys of Catamarca, Argentina. This invaluable method survived the passage of time by the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. To tell this story raises awareness about the forgetfulness of traditions and empowers a community through the exposure of their unique cultural expression.

After designing a plan to strengthen the transmission of this technique, the project encouraged five women to form a group that keeps the craft alive. They are the ones who know how to take advantage of the forest and transform its resources into a wonderful source of fabrics. They carry out the entire process: from the recollection of raw materials to the finished piece.

Their names are: Paula Romero, Angélica Moreyra, Encarnación Rodríguez, Elena Bulacios and Elvira Bulacios, all of whom share their personal experience and tell us about the hard work involved in weaving each single piece.

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Credits

Video documental “Wild silk, hidden treasure”

Direction and script: Martina Cassiau

Camera and montage: Fabricio Diaco

Drone camera: Cristian Zárate

Music: Ernesto Méndez (*Guitars of the World Collection. Vol 23: “Alma Guaraní”*).

Weavers in order of appearance:

Paula Lidia Romero de Quiroga.

Elena Bulacios.

Elvira Bulacios.

Encarnación Rodríguez.

Angelica Moreyra.

Project “Wild silk, hidden treasure”

(Winner of the competitive funds for the Safeguarding of the PCI-CRESPIAL - UNESCO)

Project management: Martina Cassiau.

Technical team: Joel Flores, Marcia Vergara and Lucio Agustoni.

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- Catamarca Museums Department.
- Ancasti Heritage Department.
- Secretary of State for Tourism of the Government of Catamarca.
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A project inspired by the book "Women of Silk and Earth" by Ruth Corcuera.
In memory of Mónica Asin and Negra Luna, passionate women and lovers of Latin American popular art.

Subtitles

“Wild silk, hidden treasure.”
Ancasti, Catamarca, Argentina.
2016-2018.

This Project revives the artisan technique of spinning wild silk from the land of Ancasti, which was passed down through generations to the present day.

To relive this history is to warn about the forgetfulness of traditions and empowers this cultural expression typical of a territory, a landscape and a community.

Currently, five women keep this tradition alive. They know to how to turn the environment into a wonderful source of textiles.

They carry out the whole process: from the collection of the raw material to the finished piece.

Elena Bulacios (Elena): Hello, I’m Bulacio Elsa Elena.
Elvira Bulacios (Elvira): Hello, my name is Elvira Isolina Bulacio.
Encarnación Rodríguez (Encarnación): My name is Dolores Encarnación Rodríguez.
Angélica Moreyra (Angélica): I’m Angélica Moreyra.
ER: I live in “Potrero de los Córdoba”. And well, I came to the Doña Paula ´s course.
Angélica: I’m Doña Paula ´s student.
Elvira: I’ve been learning for three years.
Encarnación: Learning to weave the “coyoyo”, the wild silk.

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National Arts Award.
Craft weaves.

Doña Paula: I’m Romero Paula Lidia. I’m 81. My birthday is in a few days. I was born in the place of the “cuchillas”, in the Ipizca land, but I grew up here, in Santa Gertrudis, since I was ten until the present. I live here.

Doña Paula: The only way to survive was working with these weaves. Look, nobody has taught me this technique. I used to look how they weaved. I used to look how they spun. And I thought “*this couldn’t be a silk. So think? It must to be thin*”. That’s the reason why I developed this technique. Do what I did... nobody did this. By myself, without anyone teaching me, I didn’t ask or nothing like that.

Encarnación: The process starts when you have to go out to the field to collect the raw material, the little cocoons.

Elena: We go to the field with my daughter to find it. And my husband too. When he finds cocoons in the field, he collects them.

Elvira: I collect this from the field.

Doña Paula: The cocoons without the butterflies are ready to be processed. The heaviest cocoons have the butterfly inside. Not those.

Elena: You know when the butterfly is inside, because it's heavy. This one doesn't have it.

Encarnación: The little butterflies throughout the winter are in the cocoon. Only in spring-summer, they go out.

Elena: If they have the butterflies, you have to collect them to put it on a wire and then in a plant.

Doña Paula: I hang them in a wire, and when the fly time comes, they fly. And the cocoons are ready to be processed.

Encarnación: You boil the water with ash.

Angélica: The ash settles and water becomes clear.

Encarnación: Here, we have "Quebrachos", "Cebil"... they are strong logs. The ash of these materials is strongest than others.

Doña Paula: Then, I put them in a fine fabric.

Encarnación: And you have to verify that this fabric doesn't fade, it's very important, because if the fabric fades, it will stain the silk. And here, we work it pure, in the wild colour.

Doña Paula: I tie the fabric with the cocoons inside, and I put them in a jar with water.

Encarnación: You cook the cocoons for 20 minutes, approximately. When you use the ash of a weaker firewood, it's half an hour.

Angélica: Then, I take the cocoons out and I wash them with clean water.

Doña Paula: Until the dirt comes out and they are clean.

Elvira: I will show how they are cooked. They look like this, can you see?

Encarnación: And you put it to dry. Sometimes it takes up you three days, it depends... You can't do it in direct sun, it has to be in the shade, so that the silk wool doesn't weigh down.

Doña Paula: I put one by one on the table, so that it will air. They have to be wet, not dry. I start looking for the hole in the cocoon, where the butterflies come out. And I start to open that hole, until the cocoon turns, so I clean very well the inside of the cocoons, and now they are ready to be processed.

Elvira: Then I chalk the wool. And it looks like this.

Doña Paula: And I stretch it like this, and the "cadejo" is formed.

Encarnación: Little by little. You make a "madejita" around your wrist.

Doña Paula: Like this, can you see? And then, I put it around my fingers, like this.

Encarnación: And then, with a spindle, you are going to spin it.

Encarnación: Doña Paula taught us her technique: how to spin very fine.

Elena: And then we have to twist it, to make the "madejita", to wash and make the "ovillo", to weave.

Encarnación: That very fine thread is almost like sewing thread. And then, with a second "hilada", the thread becomes a little thicker.

Angélica: Then, I make two "ovillos". And I have to twist it into another spindle, which is a little bigger than this one.

Elvira: Make the "ovillo", put the tread in the loom, weave.

Elena: To weave scarves and "chalinás".

Doña Paula: And well, you can see the silk in the loom. The loom is ready with the "envolvedor" and the "sujetador". And it starts to work crossed, like this.

Elena: This blanket is from my dad. It's more than hundred years old. My aunt wove it. It's to cover yourself or use it like this when you go out on horseback.

Elvira: To weave a scarf, I need about 350 cocoons. It takes over a month and a half. I wove this in a creole loom. Instead, I'm weaving this one by one, with knots. To finish the piece, I do "macramé" at the ends.

Encarnación: It's a technique of knots, with it you can express various motifs, such as a flowers or triangles.

Elvira: My daughter is Florencia Fernández, she is 12 years old. I taught her how to weave the wild silk, to perform at a science fair at school. So, she performed at the science fair here, in Ancasti. She won and she went to compete in the capital of Catamarca. She won again and she went to Córdoba.

Encarnación: I've a daughter who loves everything about knitting. So, everything I learn, I teach it to her. I can only see her on the weekends, because she goes to a pupil school, she is in high school. And she is out all week. And on the weekends, specially on Sundays, she knits.

Doña Paula: I feel proud when they already know, and I love when all of them can sell their own weaves, and have money in their hands, money they have earned.

Encarnación: I feel that this isn't to be missed.

Angélica: It's important to me, because it's something unique.

Encarnación: If you like weaving... you can continue learning things. Knowledge doesn't take place, right?

Encarnación: It's beautiful that the world sees this. This is ours. We collect it from the field, our land.

Doña Paula: For me, the important thing is to know and exercise the trade. Because, if I have knowledge, but I don't exercise it or I don't share with anyone, it's nothing. It's important to me, this is for them. So that in the future, they teach their daughters. And with this knowledge, maybe they could say: *"look, I did it with my own work"*.

Encarnación: What's cutter than this? We have to continue. We have to keep learning everything we can.

Doña Paula: Today is a happy day for me, because I'm with people who love me and who appreciate me. Who value what I have in my heart and what I do with my hands?

Doña Paula: When God decides: *"Get out of this world"*. Only then I'll stop knitting. When I no longer have the eyes to see my friends, my sun, the girls. Then I'll stop knitting. As long as God gives me health and life, I'll always be weaving. When I get old, like a little weasel, I'll continue knitting. Even though I'm sitting and can't stand up, I'll say *"give me that wool, I'm going to spin it"*, or *"give me something I want to work"*. I can't be lazy, never.

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