



ANDEAN SLING BRAIDS: NEW DESIGNS FOR TEXTILE ARTISTS

by Rodrick Owen and Terry Newhouse Flynn.
Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 4880 Lower Valley Road, Atglen,
Pennsylvania 19310. 2016. Hardcover. 216 pages. \$39.99.

This lavish publication would be an ideal gift for fiber artists who have everything, even if they might never have expressed interest in narrow wares, let alone Andean sling braids. The coffee-table-worthy volume is a work of art itself. The cover has a lovely matte finish with high-gloss accents, a combination echoed by the pages inside, for the clear, vibrant colors of the photos and diagrams are glossy also. The back cover has a little pocket that contains a special 32-slot braiding card for those who cannot wait to get started, or who do not have a marudai (Japanese braiding stand)

and core frame. The core frame is recommended for 32 of the 47 braid designs. The 15 designs that can be readily executed without a core frame are asterisked in the table of contents—and plans for building a core frame can be found in the appendix. This is clearly a book that has benefited from a great amount of care, thought, and attention to detail.

Andean sling braids are exactly what you might suspect they are. Since pre-Columbian times, the herders of the Pacific coast of South America have used slings to toss pebbles and clay pellets at their alpacas and llamas (and post Columbus, sheep) to keep the animals from straying. The slings consist of two long braids, with a woven cradle in the center to hold the missile. Because life is too short to work with ugly tools, these utilitarian objects have long been intricately braided in mixed patterns of diamonds, stripes, chevrons, zigzags, and spirals. For all their complexity, the braids were traditionally worked in the hand, without equipment or tools. Over time, as befits such labors of love, the braids were treasured for themselves and became part of ceremonial clothing. In addition to their dazzling braided patterns, such decorative braids may be festooned with exuberant pompoms, fringes or tassels.

Owen and Flynn's book focuses on the artistic possibilities for sling braids, rather than on their historic or anthropological aspects. One of the unique features of sling braids is that they are braided around a core. This means that colors can be switched out of the core and incorporated into the braid, and colors currently in the braid can be hidden in the core. This braid structure allows for an enormous number of design possibilities.

Chapter one describes the equipment that makes it possible to create the braids without having an Andean braider's manual dexterity and deep understanding of structure. Chapter two is a discussion of yarn and fiber characteristics that provides insights useful to all fiber arts. The chapter also discusses design considerations such as the use of color and crafting a product to suit an intended purpose. You do not have to

attempt a single braid in order to benefit from this book. In chapter three, the authors provide detailed information about the basic mechanics of braiding—making the warp, setting up the equipment, winding kumihimo bobbins properly, and the basic movements of the bobbins used to form the braids. Chapters four through seven, or pages 49 – 199, are almost entirely photographs of the braid designs and step-by-step diagrams of how to make them. These diagrams are easy to understand, especially for kumihimo braiders—elegantly simple, depicting with colored dots and arrows which bobbins to move, and where to move them.

This book would be an excellent gift for a fiber friend or a special treat for oneself. It would also be an excellent addition to the libraries of guilds whose members are interested in sampling a wide variety of fiber arts.

*Reviewed by Elisa Mui Eiger
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