The Many Faces of Fair Trade

by Jocelyn Boreta, Global Exchange

In the movement to distinguish fair trade crafts from mass manufactured global goods we strive to know the faces of production. The weathered faces of women weaving in the highlands; families gathered together around workshop tables carrying on a traditional art; teams of buyers and designers bent over design sheets and order forms. The closer one gets to fair trade the more diverse its faces become. It is critical that in defining fair trade craft standards and labeling processes that we identify this diversity as part of the reality and strength of the fair trade movement.

Through my work as a buyer for a fair trade craft wholesaler and retailer, working directly with artisan communities, it has become clear that in order to practice fair trade I must recognize its different faces:

(1) the independent artisan
(2) the small family business
(3) the community cooperative
(4) the large scale fair trade exporter

Each face represents an important and interconnected sector of the fair trade movement.

(1) THE INDEPENDENT ARTISAN

Louis holding a traditional retablo artpiece in his workshop.

The face of the independent artisan belongs to Louis, a traditional retablo artist (Latin American devotional painter) who designs, molds, paints and finishes each piece in his home on the outskirts of Ayacucho, Peru. His life-long training allows him to produce crafts for the local market and limited export. His access to the global market is limited and his survival depends on his connection to a small network of colleagues who work together to create innovative designs, set prices and make connections.

(2) THE SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS

Tito's family carving and painting colorful gourds.

The face of the small family business belongs to that of Tito Medina and four generations of gourd carvers. Tito, his parents, siblings and community members work together in Cochas, Peru to keep a family tradition alive in their production of decorative gourds. In building the family business, decision-making power and benefits are shared amongst the members. Again market access is highly competitive and limited to local connections and a few overseas contacts. Their success depends on the exclusivity of their designs, the capacity of their production and the chance to build sustainable connections and markets.

(3) THE COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE

At the community center where eighty members of the cooperative came to show us their artwork. This husband and wife team where excited to show us how they spun their wool.

The face of the community cooperative belongs to Hilos y Colores, an association of six working groups, spread throughout the highlands of Peru, each of which has an elected president who works closely with the next to represent group needs and coordinate production of beautiful wool weavings in each community. Production depends on a solid democratic process in decision-making and profit-sharing, which connects the rural indigenous communities. Labor is shared amongst the whole community, men and women, old and young, so as to engage and elevate

continued on page 8

continued from page 7

(3) THE COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE

One of the six communities holding their artwork of woven wool belts.

all members. This type of organization focuses on sustainable community based enterprise in which members take ownership over production and share in its proceeds.

(4) THE LARGE SCALE FAIR TRADE EXPORTER

The face of the large scale fair trade exporter belongs to Allpa – a WFTO (World Fair Trade Organization) member – that has been working with artisan communities throughout Peru in the production of handmade crafts for over twenty-three years. Allpa has more than 100 workshops that produce hundreds of different items such as gourds, contemporary weavings, ceramics, bags, scarves, gloves and baskets. The artisans are given designs and Allpa provides consistent support, follow-up, technical assistance, financing and training. Decisions are made at the executive level and labor is organized from the top-down. Production is competitive. The most efficient weavers are given the most work and the most successful designs are thus reproduced at the lowest price. Through this process Allpa is able to produce market responsive, high quality products with constantly evolving designs, which provides sustainable growth and income for a wide range of artisans.

Even though the large scale exporter is the most competitive source of fair trade products, and most commonly recognized by international fair trade member organizations, it is important to remember that designs and traditional production processes are also sourced and sustained at the level of the independent artisan, family business and community cooperative. Each of these fair trade craft faces works to keep traditional craftsmanship alive. ■

Domestic Fair Trade Collaboration and Accountability Agreement Signed by Fair Trade Certifiers

For the the past year, the Domestic Fair Trade Association has been facilitating a dialogue among fair trade and social justice standard-setters and certification programs with the goal of working cooperatively to build a movement for socially just agriculture. Now several of these organizations along with key stakeholders have signed an agreement to continue this dialogue, transparently release program information, and work towards a code of conduct for fair trade and social justice certification programs. This commitment is an important statement of solidarity within the movement and an understanding that our common vision is stronger than our program differences.

The agreement, which we've called the Boston Accord, was signed by Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) partners including six chapters of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, Florida Organic Growers, Rural Advancement Foundation International, and El Comite de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agricolas as well as the Institute for Marketecology (IMO) and Scientific Certification Systems (SCS). AJP is the developer of the first domestic fair trade certification standards and Food Justice Certified label, IMO is a respected international fair trade certifier with the Fair for Life label and announced last year they are looking for pilot projects in North America, and SCS developed the Certified Fair Labor label for both domestic and international application.

Showing support for this important process, a number of stakeholders from across the food and agriculture system also signed the Accord including: Berkshire Co-op Market, Centro Campesino, Community to Community Development, Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, Equal Exchange, fairDeal Value Chain, Fair World Project, Farmer Direct Co-op, Midwest Organic Services Association, Once Again Nut Butter, Organic Valley, and Willamette Seed and Grain.