



VITAL SIGNS:

All photos this story:
Paola Gianturco



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Photojournalist Paola Gianturco, a member of Friends whose pro bono project in 2000 was to document weavers in 15 highland villages for the Ixchel Museum's photo archive, has included many of those images in her new book, *¡Viva Colores! A Salute to the Indomitable People of Guatemala* (powerHouse Books; \$40; www.vivacolores.com).

The first of her three books, *In Her Hands, Craftswomen Changing the World*, shows how indigenous craftswomen who live on less than \$1 a day are feeding and educating their children with the money they earn. Gianturco and her co-author, Toby Tuttle, visited Guatemala in 1997 to interview and photograph weavers. Leslie Claxton Wilson introduced her to FOIM cofounder Baysis Hempstead and the Ixchel Museum. One chapter of *In Her Hands* featured the Museum's Pro-Teje Project.

Gianturco returned to Guatemala five times over the past ten years. Each time she completed an assignment she took additional photographs for herself; Gianturco had fallen in love with the country and its people.

That love informs her latest book, *¡Viva Colores!*. It consists of Gianturco's photos and her writer husband David Hill's mini-profiles of 41 Guatemalans—"everyday heroes," she calls them—who are rebuilding their nation. Take Fermin Ortega Herrera, a former sugar cane worker, who turned out to be a talented builder and now heads a team that builds water



¡VIVA COLORES AND VIVA PAOLA!

systems for highland villages. Or Hermine de Muralles who sold tortillas as a young girl and now oversees the school systems of 321 municipalities. And yes, there are weavers, all effective entrepreneurs.

The book celebrates the indomitable spirit of Guatemalans who use color to express their vitality and valor, despite the fact that their recent history is black: the 36-year civil war disrupted more than a million lives; an estimated 75% of the population lives in poverty; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes have been calamitous.

The feeling of optimism in *¡Viva Colores!* is greatly enhanced by the images. In fact, Gianturco's photographs of colorful house facades, storefronts, buses, market displays and—especially—of hand

woven textiles steal the show. "Colors", says the photographer, "have long had meaning for Mayans: Black represents the west, where the sun sets; red stands for east where the sun rises; white signifies north where the rains comes from, and yellow, south, where the sun shines."

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Well and good. But Gianturco clearly celebrates color for color's sake and by far the most striking portraits are those that focus on indigenous women's clothing. The textiles are unique, glorious not only in themselves but also in their context as everyday garb. As the Ixchel Museum has often pointed out, costumes lend meaning and identity to the wearer and life to the landscape. They are a national treasure. The book title says it all: *viva colores!*

Women from Churrancho, Guatemala dressed in traditional hand woven clothing.

