



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Mundillo: The Handiwork of Revival and Transformation in Puerto Rico

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Mundillo, the traditional Puerto Rican art of bobbin lace, is a practice in the midst of change. As a result of new technology and increased travel, the availability of patterns and materials is far beyond that afforded to the previous generation. Once a series of patterns passed among townspeople and training centers, *mundillo* has expanded with Internet access, tourism, and inexpensive airfares to Spain and other countries with a lace tradition. Furthermore, lacemaking is not restricted to females. The establishment of a museum dedicated to *mundillo* recognizes its history and relationship to Puerto Rican culture, while the marketing of Moca as *El Capital del Mundillo* points to an identity shaped by tourism.

Through a historical study of *mundillo*, this project seeks to establish an understanding of women's labor and gender relations in the production of lace, and thereby show how *mundillo* became representative of Puerto Rican culture between 1900 and 1940. As a cultural and historical study of women's labor as *mundillistas*, the project will also contextualize *mundillo's* role within Puerto Rico's tourism-based economy. The study of *mundillo* affords a means of examining these ongoing processes of representation, specifically in relation to the construction of gender and cultural identity. I accomplish this through the following methods: historical research on the production of lace by Puerto Ricans, visual analysis of cultural representations in photographs, contextualization of the material culture of *mundillo* within museum collections, and oral history interviews.