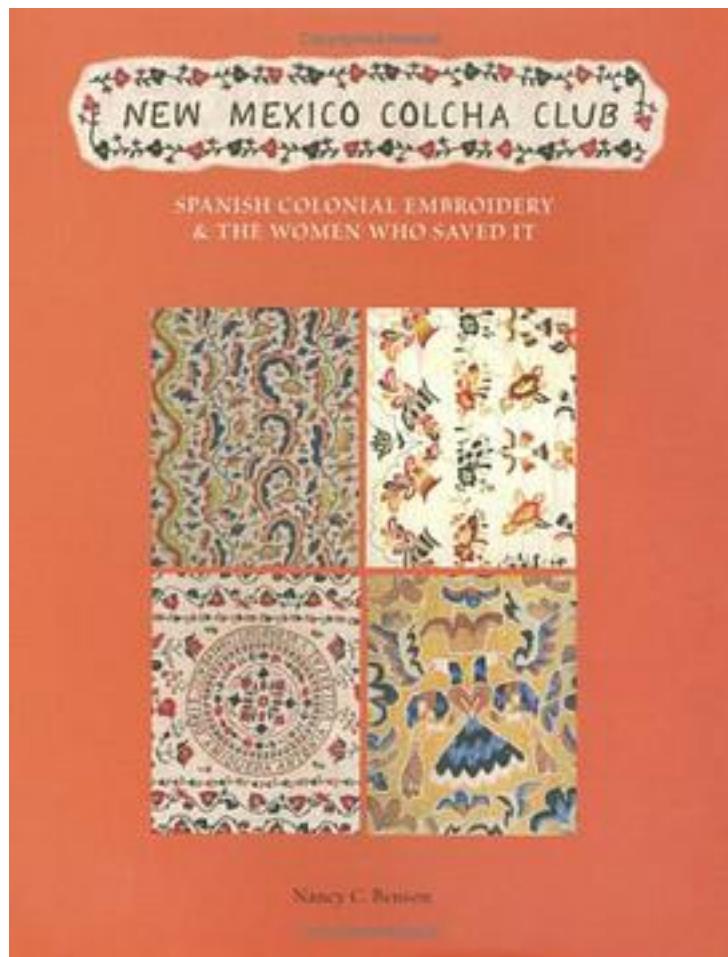


# New Mexico Colcha Club



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New Mexico Colcha Club looks at the history, beauty, and various styles of New Mexico colcha embroidery, and tells the uplifting story of how a small group of determined women revived a cultural tradition destined for extinction. In the 1700s Spanish

colonial women in the isolated province of New Mexico wanted to add beauty and warmth to their bedding. They worked their homespun yarn in a long couching stitch to create the flowing needlework that came to be called "colcha embroidery." Highly sought after and valued, a detailed embroidered piece could cost upwards of 46 pesos. (During the same time period, sheep and cows cost 2 and 15 pesos respectively). However, a century later colcha was on its way to oblivion. Like many traditional crafts, this beautiful and skilled artform was becoming obsolete as inexpensive and abundant commercial cloth, modern styles, and machine-made products became more desirable and available. Fast-forward to the 1920s and the Arte Antiguo, a colcha club founded by twelve Hispanic women in the Espanola Valley of New Mexico. Spearheaded by Teofila Ortiz Lujan and then later her daughter, Esther Lujan Vigil, these women heroically sought to rescue colcha and bring it back to its rightful place as a cherished custom. The women traveled to churches to examine vintage altar cloth, hunted through attics and archives in search of examples of the antique embroidery, and sketched old patterns--all in the hopes of keeping colcha from extinction and activating a revival of the embroidery. Esther Lujan Vigil, through her artwork and teaching, keeps the tradition alive and has elevated colcha from a folk art to a fine art. Divided into three sections, the first part of the book traces the roots of the embroidery tradition and domestic life in colonial New Mexico. The second part looks at the Arte Antiguo's push in the early twentieth century to revive this lost art. The third part focuses on Esther Lujan Vigil's artistic skills and the renaissance of colcha embroidery today. New Mexico Colcha Club features historical and recent photographs of colcha work that demonstrate the beauty, intricacy, and diversity of this Old World custom. This inspirational and informative biography of colcha is folk art enlivened by social history. It is a must read for those interested in Spanish textile traditions and folk art, needlework, and New Mexico history.

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