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ART, CRAFTSMANSHIP, AND URBAN SPACE AS INSTRUMENTS OF IDENTITY REINFORCEMENT AND TOURIST ATTRACTION: THE CROSSES OF MAY FESTIVAL IN CONTEMPORARY GRANADA

Gerardo Díaz Quirós*
Fundación San Juan de Dios (Madrid)

Abstract

From an anthropological perspective, festivals have been conceptualized as a total social phenomenon, insofar as they encapsulate the political, economic, religious, artistic, and other dynamics that shape a community. Moreover, they are particularly characterized by the processes of dynamism, adaptation, and cultural transformation inherent in many forms of cultural heritage, making them an especially suitable framework for scholarly analysis.

The Crosses of May Festival in Granada provides an illustrative example of how art, craftsmanship, and urban space interact and converge to reinforce local identity while simultaneously creating a high-value tourism product. The incorporation of artistic works and a wide range of traditional crafts into the design and decoration of the crosses—including textile production and embroidery, copperwork, fajalauza ceramics, and taracea (marquetry)—may contribute to the preservation and development of these crafts. However, this process also entails certain risks that, from a heritage perspective, may ultimately produce effects contrary to those intended for their safeguarding and promotion.

Keywords: Crosses of May Festival; Granada; craftsmanship; embroidery; copperwork; fajalauza ceramics; *taracea* (marquetry).

Historical Background and the Evolution of the Festival

The alabaster cross erected in 1625 by the residents of Granada's San Lázaro district, together with the grand celebration they organized around the Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross (3 May), is commonly regarded as the founding event of what would become one of the city's most significant festivals. The feast of 3 May, rooted in the legacy of the Council of Nicaea and framed by the celebrated vision of the Cross at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, is inextricably linked to the figure of Flavia Julia Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine. Around 326 CE, Helena undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, combining religious devotion with imperial authority and access to imperial resources in order

*E-mail: gerardo.diaz@sjd.es

to identify and dignify sites associated with Christ's Passion. Although sources closest to her journey make no mention of the discovery of relics, accounts written in the late fourth century progressively elaborated the narrative of the finding of the True Cross. According to these later traditions, when Helena ordered the demolition of the pagan temple erected by Hadrian on Mount Calvary, a cistern containing remains associated with Roman executions was uncovered, and—amid accounts enriched with supernatural elements—the remains of Christ's Cross were identified[1]. While the Church of Jerusalem appears to have commemorated this discovery from an early date, it was Pope Sergius I who introduced the feast into the Roman Rite at the end of the seventh century. Over time, the liturgical calendar established two celebrations associated with the Cross: the Feast of the Invention on 3 May and the Feast of the Exaltation on 14 September.

It is easy to understand that, beyond its significance for Christianity as a whole, the festival acquired particular resonance in a city such as Granada. The erection and destruction of crosses became embedded within the dynamics of triumph and resistance—whether explicit or latent—between Christianity and Islam. This process manifested itself in episodes such as the destruction of crosses during the War of the Alpujarras and the subsequent proliferation of public crosses in streets and squares, including those of San Lázaro and the Campo del Príncipe, erected in 1640 and later associated with the deep-rooted devotion to the Cristo de los Favores. Other manifestations included the creation of calvarios (Stations of the Cross), among which the route extending from the Albaicín to the Cerro de San Miguel and the one promoted by the Franciscans within the Alhambra precinct stand out.

For the purposes of this article, it is noteworthy that the liturgical significance of the 3 May celebration was weakened following the promulgation of Pope John XXIII's motu proprio *Rubricarum instructum* in 1960. This reform simplified the liturgical rubrics and eliminated duplicate feasts from the calendar, preserving only the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on 14 September. The change was subsequently confirmed by the liturgical calendar promulgated under Pope Paul VI. As a result, the celebration of 3 May was increasingly left to the sphere of popular devotion, thereby acquiring an even greater capacity for reinterpretation and transformation.

The festival's festive and secular dimensions, which often overshadowed its religious foundations, had been developing since the eighteenth century. Like many popular celebrations, it accumulated forms of disorder and excess that ecclesiastical authorities repeatedly sought to correct. These tendencies persisted throughout the nineteenth century, during which the festival was portrayed by costumbrista literature in terms of its most picturesque and recreational aspects. Twentieth-century historiography, in turn, interpreted the celebration as being linked to pre-Christian festivities associated with the agricultural cycle.

The pioneering figure in the anthropological study of festivals in Spain is Julio Caro Baroja, whose 1979 work *La estación del amor: fiestas de mayo a San Juan* is particularly relevant in this context[2]. Regarding the Crosses of May in Granada specifically, the most influential studies are those of José A. González Alcantud—whose seminal 1990 article remains highly relevant—and Juan José

Montijano Ruiz, who, from a perspective informed by literary scholarship, has produced important monographic studies on Granada's major festivities[3]. Montijano's exhaustive review of newspaper sources provides valuable information which, when extracted, cross-referenced, and contextualized, enables significant conclusions to be drawn concerning the general evolution of the festival's aesthetics (**Fig.1**).



Fig. 1. May Cross in the courtyard of the Casa de los Pisa Museum and Archive.
Source: Casa de los Pisa Archive.

González Alcantud himself lamented the scarcity of genuinely ethnological data concerning the Festival of the Cross prior to the nineteenth century, as well as the limited information provided by contemporary newspapers[4]. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests a gradual consolidation of the celebration throughout the nineteenth century. The festival reached one of its high points during the 1920s, characterized by the creation of magnificent altars, strong community and institutional involvement, and widespread public enthusiasm. The First Municipal Competition for May Crosses, organized in 1924, exemplified this momentum. Yet this flourishing period proved relatively short-lived. With the advent of the Second Spanish Republic and its broader programme of reassessing traditional festivities, the celebration appears to have lost much of its former splendour.

According to González Alcantud, this decline became even more pronounced after the Civil War. Public authorities—and possibly the Archbishop of Granada, Cardinal Parrado—were reportedly more concerned with the festival's playful and grotesque dimensions than with its devotional aspects. A significant revitalization

did not occur until 1963, under the leadership of Antonio Gallego Morell at the Provincial Tourism Board. Gallego Morell himself later acknowledged in several interviews that his efforts to extend the duration of the festivities were ultimately unsuccessful. The nature of the festival itself complicates any such extension, since the safety of the installations must be ensured, while it is also important to recognize the informal expansion of the celebration during the preceding days. The nights dedicated to preparing decorations and assembling the crosses foster social interaction among participants, and their vitality is essential to the success of the event.

Considerable scholarship has examined how the Romantic image of Spain disseminated by nineteenth-century travellers influenced Spanish tourism policies.[5] Institutions such as the Royal Tourism Commission (Comisaría Regia de Turismo, founded in 1911) under the direction of the Marquis de la Vega-Inclán, and later the National Tourism Board (Patronato Nacional de Turismo, established in 1928), developed strategies aimed at major international events such as the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition and the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville.[6] These organizations viewed *costumbrismo* and regional distinctiveness as powerful attractions for foreign visitors, contributing to a paradoxical process of identity construction in which local realities were often adapted to meet external expectations, thereby performing authenticity through carefully crafted representations.

The Festival of the Cross possessed all the attributes necessary to serve as a cornerstone of such tourism strategies. It combined the celebration of local traditions with strong religious symbolism, first fitting comfortably within the discourse of national Catholicism during the early Franco regime and later providing highly recognizable imagery for the campaigns of the Ministry of Information and Tourism, established in 1951. Its visual and aesthetic configuration also aligned easily with Manuel Fraga's famous "Spain is Different" promotional strategy. In the early 1970s, the provincial branch of the Ministry of Information and Tourism helped finance the Crosses Competition and synchronized the celebration with Granada's Tourist Day, welcoming visitors through the symbolic distribution of carnations

The Endurance of the Ephemeral

It may reasonably be argued that artistic manifestations compatible with what is now termed ephemeral art have existed since the earliest expressions of human creativity, being defined above all by the notion of transience. One might, however, speak of a form of "relative transience," since its duration may range from the fleeting moments of a fireworks display to the span of a human life—sometimes extended by particularly favorable conditions of preservation, as in the case of tattoos. Between these extremes lie forms such as event-specific ornamentation, as well as conceptual art, land art, and body art.

Although some of these manifestations may be preserved through literary description, reproduced in drawing, painting, or photography, or even recorded as moving images, many retain with remarkable clarity the notion of "that which will never be again." They thereby acquire the aura celebrated by Romanticism,

echoing the words spoken by Zeus in Goethe's *Vier Jahreszeiten* "I make beautiful only that which is ephemeral."

A showcase of Renaissance erudition and an epitome of the Baroque spirit, ephemeral artistic compositions—often architectural structures incorporating painting, sculpture, decorative arts, and even music and dance—reached a particularly sophisticated level of development during the Early Modern period. Indeed, scholars such as Moreno Cuadro have regarded them as the most complex manifestation of artistic integration during the Spanish Golden Age.[7] Some of these expressions have survived, while others have evolved upon the foundations of this long-standing tradition. In Andalusia, they remain especially vibrant within the world of religious brotherhoods (*hermandades*), particularly penitential confraternities, which have incorporated the creation of elaborate temporary devotional altars into their practices[8]. These include ephemeral installations for the veneration of their principal sacred images, as well as Corpus Christi altars and other decorative interventions in streets and public squares associated with processions and religious celebrations. A clear line of continuity may therefore be traced from Baroque festival culture, through the civic ornamentation of the nineteenth century—with its abundance of triumphal arches and ceremonial decorations for inaugurations, royal visits, and military parades—to contemporary forms of ephemeral art, among which Granada's Crosses of May occupy a prominent place.

Reinterpretation and Appropriation of Urban Space

Within a process of transgression and inversion—phenomena inherently associated with festive culture and exemplified most clearly by Carnival—the Festival of the Cross in Granada produces interventions in urban space that are both physical and conceptual in nature. For a limited period, public space is delimited, interrupted, or temporarily appropriated. At the same time, and almost as an unconscious counterpart, spaces normally inaccessible to the public are opened and transformed into sites of collective participation: courtyards, entrance halls, communal dwellings, convent precincts, and cloisters.

An illustrative example is the Cross that has been installed for decades at Casa Ajsaris on Calle Zafra (**Fig. 2**), a Moorish house centred around a beautifully landscaped courtyard. During the festival, works from what is arguably the city's most important private collection of Granadan painting are displayed there. For many years, the owners have preserved the spirit of collective participation by collaborating with local associations, resulting in installations of exceptional refinement. Similarly, the courtyard of the Camarín of Our Lady of the Rosary serves as the setting for the Cross erected by the Archconfraternity, renowned for the historical character of its designs and the remarkable collection of antiques temporarily displayed on the walls of a space largely unknown even to many residents of Granada.

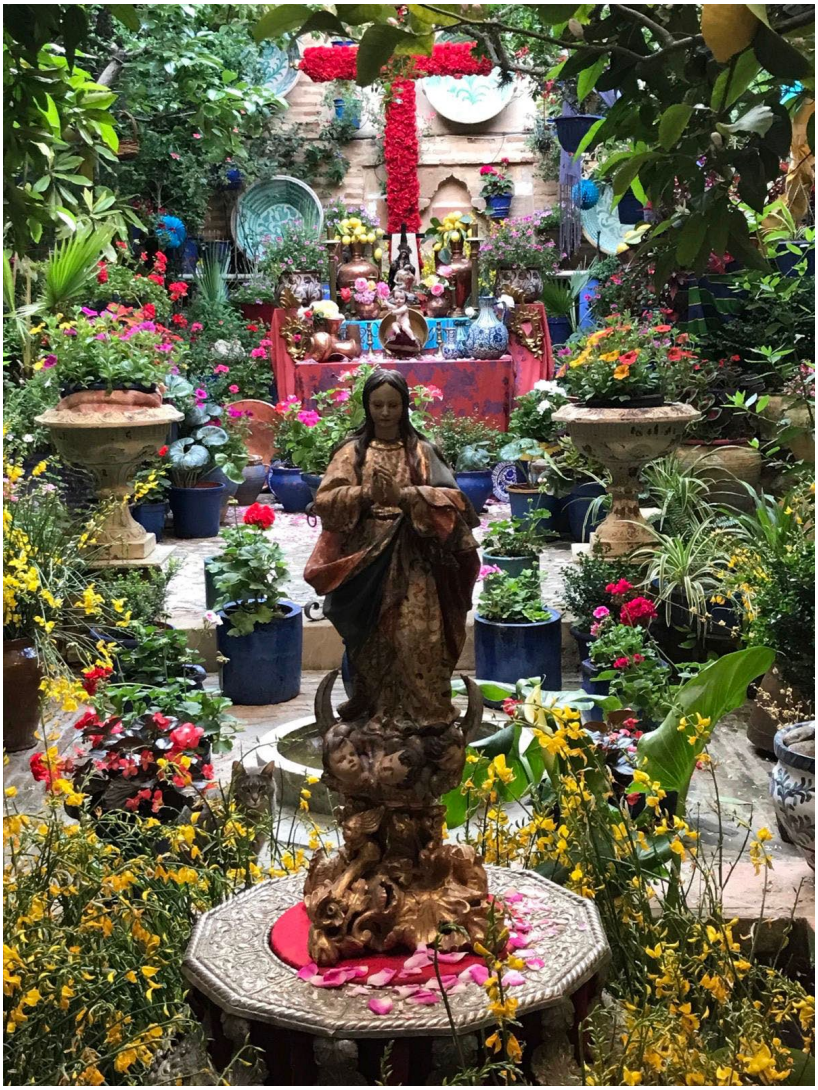


Fig. 2. May Cross at Casa Ajsaris. 2025.
Source: Estrella Villegas.

Historic neighbourhoods such as the Albaicín and the Realejo are perceived and represented in distinctive ways during the festival. For a few days, they become geographical spaces endowed with heightened identities, capable of generating affective and expressive bonds that draw descendants of former residents back to the neighbourhood. Their sense of belonging is strengthened through comparison and festive competition. Pride in welcoming thousands of visitors and the desire to present the best image of the community foster a symbolic personalization of the neighbourhood, often orchestrated by both formal and informal associations. González Alcantud has rightly emphasized the importance of "territorial tension" in sustaining the vitality of the festival—a tension that may emerge between neighbouring localities, different districts, groups within the same neighbourhood, individual streets, or even households sharing the same street.

For centuries, public squares and communal courtyards constituted the principal settings for temporary altars dedicated to the Cross. In recent decades, however, these spatial patterns have changed significantly. While some

emblematic squares—such as Plaza Larga in the Albaicín or even the Placeta de la Cruz itself—have ceased to host installations, school courtyards have increasingly assumed a prominent role. The depopulation of traditional neighbourhoods, their growing conversion into tourist accommodation, the weakening of neighbourhood associations, and limited institutional support have all contributed to the disappearance of ephemeral works of remarkable authenticity and artistic quality. Conversely, the contemporary evolution of the festival has made school environments highly attractive venues. These enclosed spaces provide ample room for food stalls, seating areas, and supporting services. The risk, however, is that the Cross itself becomes progressively secondary, functioning merely as a symbolic pretext for events with considerable economic significance for the organizing institutions.



Fig. 3. May Cross on the façade of the Convent of the Discalced Carmelites, installed by the Brotherhood of Jesús Nazareno and María Santísima de la Merced. 2024.
Source: Gerardo Díaz.

Among the installations located in public spaces, a distinction may be drawn between those that decorate existing permanent crosses—thus maintaining a direct link with the origins of the celebration, although such examples are

becoming increasingly rare; those that use architectural elements as backdrops, such as the installations placed against the façade of the Discalced Carmelite convent (**Fig. 3**); and those occupying the centres of major squares and open urban spaces. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in incorporating the urban landscape itself into the composition, particularly by framing the Cross against iconic views of the city, most notably the Alhambra. Elevated viewpoints in the Albaicín or areas along the Paseo de los Tristes, despite presenting significant logistical challenges, are selected precisely for their scenic value. Notable examples include the Cross erected by the Brotherhood of the Aurora in 2026, which deliberately incorporated the silhouette of the Alhambra and the vegetation of the Darro Valley into its composition, or the installation suspended above the river during the 1970s.



Fig. 4. Municipal May Cross. Plaza del Carmen. 2026.
Source: Estrella Villegas.

Municipal involvement in promoting the festival, which reached an important milestone with the creation of the Municipal Crosses Competition in 1924, became increasingly institutionalized from the 1960s onward through the erection of an official municipal Cross, either in Plaza del Carmen (**Fig. 4**) or in Plaza de las Pasiegas, with Granada Cathedral serving as a backdrop. These official installations soon developed an aesthetic distinct from that of the popular crosses. While retaining the essential elements of the tradition, they frequently incorporated large-scale scenographic structures and oversized symbolic objects—such as guitars, woven rush chairs, or pomegranates—often serving

simultaneously as stages for musical performances. The municipality commissioned artists, decorators, and professional designers, including Manuel Parrizas in the 1940s, Ángel Escribano and César Recuero in the 1970s, and the Association of Interior Decorators in 1981.

In 2018, the City Council launched a specific design competition for the municipal Cross, seeking to engage students and young professionals from schools of design, architecture, and fine arts while opening the tradition to more contemporary forms of creativity. The winning proposal, Tradición Vertical ("Vertical Tradition"), was designed by Virginia Fajardo and Antonio Rueda of the Andalusian School of Art and Design. The project consisted of four vertical panels arranged as layered planes, each featuring a progressively smaller cross-shaped cut-out. Through these openings, viewers could observe decorative motifs inspired by traditional components of the festival, including embroidered shawls, copperwork, fajalauza ceramics, rush weaving, and carnations. Unfortunately, a severe storm destroyed the structure during installation on the eve of the celebration, forcing the municipality to erect an emergency replacement based on more conventional designs. Regrettably, the incident led to the abandonment of an initiative that might have provided a valuable platform for contemporary artistic interpretations without displacing traditional forms.



Fig. 5. May Cross by ARSconditus at the Cistercian Monastery of San Bernardo. 2026. Source: Gerardo Díaz.

The changing realities of contemplative religious life have likewise rendered conventual spaces more permeable to local festivities. Communities such as the Calced Carmelites, encouraged by the leadership of the Carmelite Museum (MUCAR), temporarily opened parts of their convent to the public, while the Hieronymite community permitted installations associated with the Brotherhood of Solitude of San Jerónimo. Particularly noteworthy is the case of the Cistercian Monastery of San Bernardo, which no longer houses a religious community and is managed by the association ARSconditus through an agreement with the Cistercian Congregation. This arrangement represents one of the most innovative models for the management of former monastic spaces. The association seeks not only to preserve cultural activity but also to maintain the spiritual vocation of the monastery. As part of its effort to integrate the monastery into civic life and provide public access to spaces once enclosed for centuries, it has participated in the Crosses of May cycle by installing a Cross within the monastery's inner cloisters. These installations emphasize conventual objects and iconography, reinforcing the religious dimension of the celebration while deliberately excluding activities considered inconsistent with the character of the site, such as commercial bars, food service, or certain forms of musical entertainment. Both the public and the municipal competition jury have responded positively to this approach (**Fig. 5**).

A particularly significant setting is provided by the *corrales de vecinos*—communal housing complexes comparable to the *corralas* of nineteenth-century Madrid—which, as González Alcantud observed, constituted "the ideal spatial and social setting for the construction of crosses and the expression of neighbourhood rivalry." Journalist Gabriel Pozo Felguera has traced the history of these structures in Granada, arguing that the typology was introduced through Islamic culture in al-Andalus while acknowledging later influences from Castilian developments.[9] Typically consisting of an enclosed building with a gate leading into a central courtyard, these spaces formed the nucleus of both social and economic life. By the late nineteenth century, approximately three hundred such housing complexes existed in Granada.

As Pozo further notes, these communal courtyards were also centres of artisanal production. Blacksmiths, carpenters, leatherworkers, ship chandlers, hat makers, furriers, goldsmiths, embroiderers, and numerous other craftsmen often maintained workshops on the ground floor. This fact is highly relevant to the present study, since these artisans presumably contributed both expertise and material resources to the decoration of festival altars whenever the resident community decided to participate. As early as 1907, *El Noticiero Granadino* observed that:

> "The spacious entrance hall that under ordinary circumstances serves as the workplace of cheerful laundresses, and the vast courtyard of those lively communal dwellings known as casas de vecinos, are transformed into temples, within which flower-laden altars are erected."[10]

The Corral del Carbón, originally constructed in the fourteenth century as a grain exchange and merchants' inn, later served successively as a theatre courtyard and a communal residential complex housing as many as thirty-six families. Following its declaration as a National Monument in 1887 and its restoration by Torres Balbás between 1929 and 1931, it became one of Granada's most emblematic historic spaces. Although it has not recently hosted Crosses of May installations—an indication of some of the challenges currently facing the festival—it was the setting for several outstanding examples organized by the Centro Artístico during the 1940s. A comparable case is the Corrala de Santiago, restored by the Regional Government of Andalusia and transferred to the University of Granada in 1991. Here, the María Auxiliadora choir of the Alhambra organized spectacular installations that took advantage of the building's galleries to display richly coloured textiles, shawls, and embroidered fabrics.

Alongside these monumental settings, the festival also allows participants to rediscover hidden spaces within the urban fabric. The Roma community, for example, frequently installed crosses inside cave dwellings, particularly in the Sacromonte district, although these were rarely accessible to the general public. Even today, private individuals continue to erect small crosses in domestic courtyards, participating in the festival on a more intimate scale among relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Likewise, narrow passageways and overlooked urban corners may be temporarily dignified through the presence of a Cross, as occurs in the alley beside the Church of Saints Justus and Pastor, where the parish choir annually creates a modest but highly evocative installation.

A distinctive phenomenon is that of ephemeral architecture within ephemeral architecture, or the simulation of architectural forms. Throughout the twentieth century, temporary crosses frequently incorporated models, replicas, and stage-like constructions. Fountains, cisterns, and public monuments were recreated using perishable materials, while decorative settings evoked generic "traditional" environments, such as streets and squares of the Albaicín, recognizable monuments of Granada, and especially references to the Alhambra. Some installations even reproduced mosques, such as the example created by the Philharmonic Society in 1931. This strategy was particularly prevalent in Plaza Larga, where, during the 1970s, organizers constructed a large-scale model of the neighbourhood itself.

Although the festival remains fundamentally urban in character, rural imagery increasingly permeates its visual language. Numerous ethnographic objects associated with agrarian life contribute powerfully to the reinforcement of local identity and to a deliberately cultivated sense of antiquity and continuity with the past. The vegetal carpeting surrounding the Cross—often incorporating even the cut stems of the carnations used in the display itself—seeks to establish a symbolic connection with the natural environment. In this respect it recalls, albeit with additional layers of symbolism, the great carpets of rushes, mint, rosemary, and aromatic plants laid along the route of Granada's Corpus Christi procession, materials historically provided by farmers from the fertile Vega of Granada and, as a traditional tribute, by residents of Güéjar Sierra.

Configuration and Evolution of the Cross Altar

While the ephemeral decoration of permanent crosses, embellishing their surroundings with flowers and other objects, was the norm in the early stages of the celebration, once the festival became firmly rooted it expanded into spaces without crosses, where temporary crosses were erected specifically for the occasion. In such cases, the crosses were generally constructed from perishable materials and heavily adorned with vegetation. As the Vega of Motril became capable of supplying large quantities of carnations, the red carnation cross emerged as the dominant form. The carnation itself became embedded within the festival's narrative of local identity. Drawing upon the tradition that presents it as a gift from Emperor Charles V to his wife Isabella of Portugal and claiming that some of its varieties were introduced from the East, it is said that carnations were first planted in the gardens of the Alhambra before spreading throughout the Granadan coast. With the revival of the festival during the twentieth century, the large-flowered Motril carnation—especially the red variety—became indispensable, both in the physical construction of the crosses and in the visual iconography of the celebration as represented in painting, graphic arts, and particularly poster design. Although innovation and experimentation are tolerated, and crosses incorporating ceramics, alternative plant materials, or valuable items borrowed from religious brotherhoods can occasionally be found, the festival remains inconceivable without the imposing presence of crosses densely covered in red carnations.

The cross presides over an altar which, although it permits certain departures from liturgical conventions, is fundamentally inspired by and patterned after the ecclesiastical altar. Elements such as stepped platforms, altar cloths, candlesticks, devotional images—traditionally the Immaculate Conception in Granada—kneelers, pedestals, and flower stands can readily be identified, recalling the temporary altars or *estaribeles* erected inside churches and convents for particular celebrations. Newspaper reports from the early twentieth century reveal that domestic devotional images were frequently incorporated into these installations, regardless of whether the same iconographic subjects appeared repeatedly. Both the limited photographic evidence that survives from this period and the visual record preserved in painting—such as Mariano Bertuchi's celebrated *La Cruz de Mayo* or José Alarcón's La Cruz de Mayo en Granada—suggest that the cross had not yet attained monumental dimensions. Rather, it was highlighted by a textile backdrop, such as the large ceremonial curtain visible in Bertuchi's painting, and framed by mirrors, gilded wall sconces, devotional paintings, and abundant potted plants arranged around it.

Popular discourse still refers to the *altarón* ("great altar") of the Cross. However, a review of visual documentation from recent decades reveals a significant evolution in the arrangement of its constituent elements, to the extent that the physical notion of an altar has become increasingly diffuse. The cross retains its centrality, yet aesthetic concerns and the search for originality have encouraged new compositional approaches: crosses may appear suspended,

incorporated into still-life arrangements, or accompanied by classical altar furnishings that have been spatially disassociated from their traditional positions. Likewise, as will be discussed later, ethnographic objects have acquired increasing prominence, gradually detaching themselves from the altar and developing an independent visual presence. The earliest photographic and painted representations suggest that objects which originally served practical purposes around the crosses of the early twentieth century—tables, rush-seated chairs, guitars, earthenware jars and vessels used by organizers and visitors spending long hours around the altar sharing food, drink, and music—eventually became fossilized as decorative elements. As such, they came to function as evocative symbols of a remembered past, occupying spaces around the altar now reserved for display rather than use (**Fig. 6**).



Fig. 6. May Cross by ARSconditus at the Cistercian Monastery of San Bernardo. 2023. Source: Andoni Martínez.

At least throughout the twentieth century, particularly in community-based installations—though not exclusively in these—the use of prestigious objects contributed by participants appears to have been a defining feature. Households proudly produced ancient, exotic, or particularly valuable possessions for public display in support of collective prestige. Equally important was the cleaning and polishing of these items, especially copperware, whose brilliance reflected not only the commitment of the community but also the reputation and social standing of the women responsible for their care, regardless of the collective efforts that often accompanied their preparation.

As noted above, this collaborative and communal character was not exclusive. The consolidation and growing prestige of the festival in its popular form encouraged the participation of bourgeois sectors as well, who often commissioned craftsmen to create their installations. González Alcantud cites the example of the Commercial Circle's Cross of 1924, which notably incorporated electric lighting. Likewise, the newspaper *La Publicidad* reported in 1881 on a Cross organized by the Artistic Centre (Centro Artístico) in the courtyard of the City Hall, with the proceeds dedicated to charitable purposes. The artist-members decorated the courtyard and designed a cross whose result was described by the chronicler as "fantastic" and "dazzling."[11] In 1955, public acclaim was similarly won by the remarkable installation created by stage designer Fernando Ortega at the headquarters of the Álvarez Quintero Association, which featured an innovative system of neon illumination.

Another significant development concerns the participation of commercial establishments. The spontaneous practice of shopkeepers erecting crosses in display windows eventually became institutionalized through the creation of a specific category within the Municipal Competition. In recent years, however, the relationship between these installations and the businesses themselves has become less direct. Commercial premises are increasingly made available to external groups—most commonly religious brotherhoods—which use shop windows as exhibition spaces for their own installations.

The penitential brotherhoods (*Hermandades de Penitencia*) of Granada, which underwent a period of revitalization between 1924 and 1928 marked by the restoration of ten historic brotherhoods and the establishment of the Federation of Brotherhoods and Confraternities in 1927, have consistently played a role in the Festival of the Cross. Their participation has taken both direct and indirect forms: overseeing installations, contributing organizational expertise, and collaborating through members and ceremonial officers (*priostes*) with neighbourhood associations and other groups. This connection has strengthened in parallel with the development of Granada's Holy Week celebrations.

Following the revitalization of the late 1970s, and particularly from the end of the 1990s onwards, the presence of the brotherhoods within the Festival of the Cross became increasingly prominent. A major milestone was reached in 2026, when the Granada City Council created a specific category for brotherhoods within the Municipal Competition. A detailed discussion of the growing role that confraternal organizations play in sustaining local festivities—ranging from Nativity scene traditions to Corpus Christi decorations—and the potential risks

associated with this prominence would exceed the scope of the present article. Nevertheless, its significance for the aesthetics of the Cross installations warrants attention. The involvement of the brotherhoods has led to the incorporation of highly sophisticated objects drawn from their ceremonial furnishings, many of them works of exceptional craftsmanship. These include silver and gilded processional ornaments, sections of the decorative structures of pasos, embroidered canopies, ornamental staffs, candelabra, vases, crests, and ceremonial baldachins.

Equally significant is the participation of experienced *priostía* (an office, generally undertaken collectively, responsible for the material preparation of worship and for the assembly, arrangement, and care of liturgical objects and furnishings, processional floats, *pasos*, altars, and temporary structures) teams, accustomed to the construction of elaborate devotional altars within churches. Their involvement has fostered a degree of pseudo-professionalization in the design and execution of Cross installations. At the same time, a conscious effort has generally been made to preserve the distinctive and traditional characteristics of the Festival of the Cross, ensuring that innovation does not undermine its essential identity.

Crafts in the Festival of the Cross: Textiles, Copperwork, Ceramics, and *Taracea*

Despite its significance, Granada's artisanal production has received relatively little comprehensive scholarly attention from the standpoint of rigorous historical analysis. Consequently, it is necessary to draw upon specialized studies devoted to particular crafts while also proposing new lines of inquiry and interpretative perspectives[12].

Textiles occupied a prominent place, especially in the altars erected in courtyards and communal dwellings. Contemporary press accounts consistently describe the abundant use of silk bedspreads, knitted fabrics, crochet work, cotton textiles, satin coverings, lacework, and even printed calico. In addition to selecting a particularly distinguished textile as a backdrop for the cross itself, balconies were draped with embroidered cloths, decorative hangings, and, most notably, *mantones de Manila* (Manila shawls). Indeed, in some of the most celebrated installations, young women were obliged to choose between contributing their shawls to enrich the communal display or wearing them personally during the festivities, often sacrificing individual display for collective prestige.

The continuing use of such textiles within the festival has contributed to the preservation of objects abandoned by changing fashions in their original contexts, including so-called *colchas morunas* (Moorish bedspreads) imported from North Africa, damask coverings, large curtains, and decorative wall hangings. A chronicle published in El Defensor de Granada in 1890 described a portal in the Albaicín "covered with multicoloured bedspreads, adorned with fragrant blankets," and densely studded with nails from which devotional paintings of various sizes were suspended[13]. Yet among these textile traditions, only the Manila shawl continues to enjoy notable vitality as an active craft tradition. It has additionally generated a tourist-oriented market through the production of machine-embroidered shawls

and scarves, affordable in price although increasingly manufactured outside Granada.

Frequently referred to in nineteenth-century sources as *pañolones de Manila*, after the Philippine port through which they passed on their journey from China to Spain—often via Mexico, where they appear to have been adopted early by elite society—these shawls inspired Spanish manufactures that by the late nineteenth century were producing embroidered silk textiles influenced by Asian models. Although the Manila Galleon had transported fabrics and embroideries since the sixteenth century, the shawl in its familiar form appears to be a creation of the early nineteenth century. In Spain it acquired its characteristic fringes and netted borders, elements that some scholars have associated with surviving Moorish influences.[14]

In November 2025, the exhibition *Entre hilos y vuelos: el arte eterno del mantón y la mantilla* ("Between Threads and Flights: The Timeless Art of the Shawl and Mantilla") opened at the former Hospital of San Juan de Dios in Granada. Curated by Adrián Contreras, Juan Manuel Segura, and María Dolores Santos, it examined the role of these garments through paintings by José María López Mezquita, Gabriel Morcillo, Francisco Soria Aedo, and numerous other artists associated with the Granadan school. The exhibition highlighted the evolution of fashion, the social meanings of these garments, and their contribution to local identity[15]. The accompanying catalogue—the most significant study to date on this craft tradition in Granada—demonstrated that while the embroidery of Manila shawls developed more extensively in the province of Seville, Granada nurtured notable workshops specializing in the production of mantillas, particularly in the town of Padul. In March 2026, the municipal authorities of Padul launched an embroidery workshop under the guidance of experienced craftswomen such as Dolores Santiago, Virtudes Delgado, and Luisa García Muñoz in an effort to sustain and transmit these skills.

A powerful expression of this identity-building function may be found in *Irene y Sofía con la indumentaria tradicional del Sacromonte*, a photograph by the documentary photographer Fermín Rodríguez (professionally known as Ferminius). The image synthesizes the symbolic association between the Manila shawl, Fajalauza ceramics, and copperware, simultaneously depicting and constructing a distinct vision of Granadan identity.[16]

The increasing presence of textiles from the Alpujarra region is likewise noteworthy, particularly in installations featuring ethnographic objects related to traditional rural labour. Whereas earlier generations sought exotic and luxurious fabrics, contemporary displays frequently employ the vivid colours of recycled textiles used in *jarapas* (traditional woven rugs) and striped popular fabrics. These materials evoke the orchards, farmlands, and mountain communities of Granada through references to historical tools and domestic objects.[17] Historic looms, some several centuries old, still survive in villages such as Ugíjar, Sorvilán, Válor, Pampaneira, and Mecina Bombarón (**Fig. 7**).



Fig. 7. May Cross at Ave María School. 2026.
Source: Gerardo Díaz.

A related subject of considerable interest is the historic silk industry of the Kingdom of Granada. Although more extensively studied from an economic and historical perspective than from the standpoint of artistic production, it remains fundamental to understanding the development of local crafts. Sericulture appears to have been introduced into al-Andalus during the eighth century by Syrian migrants who recognised the suitability of Granada's fertile valleys for mulberry cultivation. The introduction of looms and processing technologies facilitated the growth of a prosperous silk industry that expanded substantially under Umayyad rule and looked to the courts of Persia and Syria for stylistic inspiration. Although Córdoba and Almería were initially the principal production centres, Granada achieved remarkable prominence during the Nasrid period. The white mulberry cultivated in the Alpujarra yielded silk of exceptional quality that soon acquired an international reputation and stimulated significant economic development. Despite the severe disruption caused by the Morisco Rebellion (1568–1570), silk remained an important industry through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before being superseded in the nineteenth by more profitable crops such as sugar cane and vineyards.[18]

Beyond its direct contribution to weaving and embroidery, sericulture also nourished other artisanal practices, including the production of artificial silk flowers. Although this tradition remains largely understudied, it flourished within female convents and monasteries, producing delicate floral arrangements for devotional display cabinets and glass cases. Such objects frequently appear in Crosses of May altars and represent the extension of conventual craftsmanship into domestic devotional culture, particularly among affluent families whose patronage also sustained Granada's renowned tradition of small-scale devotional sculpture.

Textiles associated with bullfighting culture also appear occasionally within festival displays, particularly from the 1920s onward. When organizers maintained links with prominent matadors, richly embroidered capes, jackets, and traditional garments might be exhibited as prestigious decorative elements, often arranged on rush-seated chairs as part of commemorative still-life compositions.

Locally produced textiles likewise featured prominently. For example, tapestries woven by the Albaicín workshop of Mata y Cumbres were loaned for the Cross installed in Plaza Larga in 1923.[19]

Copperware has become one of the indispensable elements of contemporary Crosses of May, although newspaper accounts emphasize its presence particularly from the 1940s onward, perhaps because before then copper utensils remained commonplace household objects whose inclusion required no comment. Large domestic vessels that gradually lost their practical functions owing to changing lifestyles and the adoption of new materials—especially from the 1960s onwards—survived as decorative objects. Their polished surfaces and brilliant reflections came to define the visual character of Crosses of May installations. As these objects fell out of everyday use, the festival provided a context in which they could be revalued and preserved.

Research on metalworking traditions in Granada remains surprisingly scarce. Copperworkers, brassworkers, and tinsmiths historically belonged to the same guild, yet it remains difficult to identify distinctive local workshops or stylistic typologies.[20] Their production ranged from domestic utensils and industrial equipment, such as alembics, to oil lamps, lanterns, and braziers. Decorative elaboration was particularly developed in the latter category, especially for wealthy clientele.

Unlike Fajalauza ceramics, copperwork has not generated a highly specific local identity. Instead, it evokes a more diffuse nostalgia for a traditional past, reflected in street names such as Calderería Vieja and Calderería Nueva and in generalized associations with Roma culture and the Sacromonte district. Greater local recognition has been achieved in relation to stained-glass lanterns framed with brass, whose designs frequently draw inspiration from Islamic decorative forms. Yet this recognition has not translated into extensive innovation or significant expansion of the sector, which remains largely centred upon reproductions of historical models.

A remarkable example of contemporary reinterpretation is provided by the street lamps installed along Granada's Gran Vía de Colón in 2006. Designed by sculptor José Manuel Darro and architect Alejandro Muñoz Miranda, these lanterns adapted the traditional language of Granadan glass-and-metal lanterns into a modern design. Inspired simultaneously by the form of the pomegranate and by Nasrid geometric patterns, their introduction sparked considerable public debate before ultimately becoming regarded as an exemplary instance of contemporary urban design.[21]

The association between copperworking and the Roma population occupies an important place in both ethnographic reality and popular imagination. Throughout Spain, the repair and manufacture of copper vessels by hammering was frequently, though not exclusively, carried out by Roma craftspeople.[22] The

itinerant nature of the trade, requiring few tools and permitting a combination of manufacturing, repair, and travelling commerce, suited communities that often resisted dependency upon non-Roma employers. Studies of eighteenth-century Granada indicate the presence of at least nine Roma blacksmiths and coppersmiths among a population of only thirty-seven Roma households.[23] Although the city undoubtedly contained many more metalworkers, the cultural association between Roma identity and copper craftsmanship became deeply embedded in literature and popular imagery.

This relationship intersects significantly with the history of tourism. The celebrated figure of Chorrojumo, born Mariano Fernández Santiago, illustrates how Roma identity became incorporated into Granada's tourist imagination during the nineteenth century. Having posed for Mariano Fortuny in what the painter considered traditional Roma attire, Chorrojumo transformed himself into the self-proclaimed "King of the Gypsies," becoming a colourful guide to visitors of the Alhambra.



Fig. 8. May Cross of the Brotherhood of the Roma at Sacromonte Abbey. 2026. Source: Estrella Villegas.

Meanwhile, the Roma inhabitants of Sacromonte, whose living conditions had gradually improved as a result of the work initiated by Father Manjón in 1888, began opening their cave dwellings to the curiosity of tourists and progressively domesticating the *zambra*. Although significant Roma communities also existed in the neighbourhood of San Cristóbal and in the Barranco del Abogao, Sacromonte possessed many of the attributes that made it the ideal setting for the construction of this Gypsy myth. Situated on the opposite side of the Camino de la Fuente del Avellano, across the Darro ravine and overlooking the Alhambra, the district, lined with caves along the road leading to the Abbey, gradually became populated by cave houses whose entrance halls displayed an abundance of gleaming copperware. As Cándido Ortiz de Villajos had already evoked in his newspaper chronicles, these objects challenged prevailing images of poverty and deprivation. The inns and cave venues in which flamenco was performed created a kind of permanent deconstructed *cruz:* not adorned with carnations in the traditional manner, but lavishly decorated with copper utensils, brightly painted poplar tables, Alpujarran curtains, wrought ironwork, and ceramics.

Interestingly, copper also became a powerful symbol within religious confraternal culture. The Brotherhood of the Santísimo Cristo del Consuelo y María Santísima del Sacromonte—popularly known as Los Gitanos—adopted copper as a defining feature of its ceremonial silverwork. Designed by the Sevillian workshop of Manuel de los Ríos, these copper ornaments endowed the brotherhood with a distinctive aesthetic identity that later extended throughout its ceremonial furnishings (**Fig. 8**).

The arrangement of copper objects within Cross installations has evolved considerably. In traditional tiered altars, large trays, embossed plates, and braziers were displayed according to compositional principles derived from ecclesiastical and aristocratic ceremonial decoration. Pitchers and domestic vessels often functioned as flower containers, while ladles, frying pans, and skimmers were arranged in decorative panoplies. Large cauldrons and boilers may even have retained symbolic associations with abundance and fertility, linking the Crosses of May to older seasonal rites. Today, copper objects are generally arranged as still-life compositions emphasizing particularly large or visually striking pieces, such as alembics. One of the finest collections historically displayed in the festival belonged to the Museum of San Juan de Dios–Casa de los Pisa, whose installations acquired considerable renown between 1984 and 2023 (**Fig. 9**).

Among Granada's crafts, *taracea* (wood marquetry and inlay work) enjoys an especially strong symbolic association with local identity, and Granada continues to present itself as an international reference point for the craft. Nonetheless, its presence within Crosses of May displays is more symbolic than visually dominant. Small tables and contemporary artisanal objects intended largely for the tourist market—boxes, powder cases, jewellery caskets, trays, picture frames, and chessboards—appear frequently, whereas antique furniture such as cabinets, chests, writing desks, or *jamugas* is rarely displayed. In part, this reflects the fact that such pieces were never common in ordinary Granadan households and, moreover, are poorly suited to outdoor exhibition owing to their vulnerability to weather conditions.



Fig. 9. Still life of copper objects at the May Cross of the Casa de los Pisa Museum and Archive. Source: Casa de los Pisa Archive.

The history of *taracea* has often been reduced to a narrow set of commonplaces regarding its alleged antiquity, technical refinement, and endangered status. Yet the visible network of workshops concentrated around the Cuesta de Gomérez—one of the principal pedestrian routes to the Alhambra—represents the latest stage in a process of adaptation through which the craft survived by profoundly transforming its products, materials, techniques, and typologies to meet the demands of tourism. Even within this context, distinctions remain: shops situated near the major hotels of the Alhambra continue to offer substantial furniture pieces, whereas others concentrate on increasingly standardized small-format souvenirs.

A brief article by Dr. Aguiló Alonso, published in 2009[24], provides highly relevant information for situating the recent history of *taracea* (Granadan marquetry). Of Nasrid origin and flourishing particularly during the sixteenth century, successive generations of master cabinetmakers and inlay specialists continued their work in the centuries that followed, adapting their craftsmanship to changing fashions and remaining open to external influences. María Paz Aguiló argues that these influences were predominantly Flemish in character, reaching Granada through Seville rather than directly from Italy. Nevertheless, formal comparisons suggest—and some scholars have historically maintained—that Italian influence was also present, particularly in the field of marble and stone intarsia.

Nasrid craftsmen produced polychromatic wood compositions by carving recesses into a wooden surface with gouges and subsequently filling them with

contrasting materials such as ivory, mother-of-pearl, bone, or woods of different colours. From the mid-seventeenth century onward, veneering techniques became increasingly widespread, employing both fine woods and materials such as ivory and tortoiseshell. Metal elements, often applied in relief and frequently made of silver or bronze, were also incorporated. As Aguiló Alonso notes, drawing upon unpublished notes on carpentry in Granada written by Manuel Gómez-Moreno Martínez and only published in 2001 by the Rodríguez Acosta Foundation[25] Gómez-Moreno observed the particularly frequent use of tortoiseshell in Granadan works, including processional crosses, pedestals, and display cabinets. Among these, the reliquary of the Holy Sepulchre, dating from 1675, was singled out as a work of exceptional craftsmanship.

The quality of these Baroque works of inlay and marquetry reached its apex in the creations of Fray Manuel Vázquez for the Charterhouse (Cartuja) of Granada. Between 1730 and 1747, he produced the entire sacristy furnishing ensemble, including doors, cupboards, and chests of drawers; in 1750 he also completed the screen separating the monks' choir from that of the lay brothers. In these works he employed marquetry in mahogany, ebony, granadillo, tortoiseshell, and bone. Particularly in the drawer fronts, he developed compositions with a pronounced volumetric quality. While Gallego Burín linked this approach to altar fronts executed in marble, Aguiló identified a much closer relationship with the elaborate Flemish state cabinets of the seventeenth century.

In the aforementioned work (quoted by Aguiló), Gómez-Moreno remarked, with reference to the second half of the nineteenth century:

> "Only in recent years has cabinetmaking regained momentum in this city, stimulated by commerce and reproductions. Furniture of every kind and style is produced: some in the Arab style, imitating the *ataurique*s and *mocárabes* of architecture and giving them the appearance of miniature buildings—a serious anomaly and a fundamental defect that reveals the complete ignorance and lack of artistic sensibility of their makers. Others are executed in the Renaissance style, likewise flawed by poor design, formulaic invention, and dryness of execution. Yet there are also more accurate and acceptable imitations of *mudéjar* marquetry and veneering, most of them in the Italo-Flemish style, others copying Cartuja models. These works have nothing to envy in older examples except for the distance separating inspired art from servile and mechanical industry. Nevertheless, they also contain the seeds of stagnation and depreciation."[26]

Aguiló documents how various European museums and institutions commissioned works from Granadan workshops during the final third of the nineteenth century through Spanish intermediaries. She provides correspondence and a concrete example in the figure of the carpenter Eduardo Martín, whose workshop was located at number 23 Calle de los Tintes. In the field of architectural reproductions of the Alhambra and furniture adaptations, the works produced by the workshop of Rafael Contreras—later continued by his son—constitute a particularly noteworthy example.

It was upon this foundation that, from the 1920s onwards, Granadan workshops began to redirect their production. Their focus shifted from an elite clientele—such as British travellers who purchased reproductions resembling pieces they had seen in London museums—to an increasingly mass tourist market with more diverse purchasing power. A notable example of the survival of high-quality cabinetmaking workshops, specialising in period furniture and noble-material intarsia, is the Molero workshop, founded in 1888 and currently represented by Jesús Molero Sabador, the fourth generation of the family. Other workshops, however, adapted by concentrating on smaller objects and modifying their techniques accordingly. Throughout the twentieth century, marquetry based on star and *graca* patterns became increasingly widespread. These designs were produced by slicing and assembling bundles of wooden strips in contrasting colours and gluing them onto supporting surfaces not always made from precious woods. Even within this often highly serialised production system, significant differences in quality persisted, and various shortcuts in manufacture help explain the wide range of prices encountered today.

More recently, and once again through the initiative of religious brotherhoods, interest has revived in the finest traditions of Granadan cabinetmaking beyond the aesthetic associated with the later, popularised forms of *taracea.* Although these decorative techniques had also found their way into the furnishings of confraternities as distinctive and identity-forming elements, attention is increasingly returning to masterpieces such as the celebrated works in the sacristy of the Cartuja. One notable example is the processional float (*paso*) commissioned by the Brotherhood of the Lord of Meditation (Hermandad de los Estudiantes) in Granada. Approved in 2024, the project was designed by the architect Luis Ignacio Fernández-Aragón and draws inspiration from the former Jesuit church that serves as the brotherhood's headquarters. The basket structure, crafted by the Hermanos Caballero workshop, will incorporate silverwork by Manuel de los Ríos and marquetry by Manuel Romero. As reported by the newspaper Ideal:

> Marquetry, traditionally employed in smaller liturgical objects—such as processional crosses, rule books, or ornamental details—had never before assumed a central role in an entire processional float. In this case, moreover, the designers deliberately moved beyond the most recognisable flat marquetry traditions to embrace a language of relief, depth, and meticulous detail inspired by the Sacristy of the Cartuja of Granada. The result is a work of extraordinary technical complexity, executed in fine woods including rosewood, ebony, walnut, mahogany, sycamore, olivewood, and cedar, combined with bone and elements evoking mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, and ivory.[27]

For decades, Manuel Romero Álvarez has devoted himself to the study of traditional techniques involving leather, cattail weaving, rye straw work, and *taracea*. Through the recovery of obsolete methods, materials, and production

processes, he has become a leading authority both in scholarly knowledge and in technical execution.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the ceramics produced in the kilns of Granada came to be known as "Fajalauza" ceramics. These workshops had gradually clustered, since the late sixteenth century, around the Puerta del Campo del Almendro, or Puerta de Fajalauza, in the Albaicín district. The strength of the Andalusi ceramic tradition, previously centred around the Llanos de la Alhambra, survived through the early modern and contemporary periods in Granada, a city that had also possessed ceramic production during the Roman era. While techniques such as *cuerda seca* and metallic lustreware experienced more limited development, popular pottery drew upon inherited traditions, first serving the basic needs of society and later reinventing itself as a decorative art. Although certain details and graphic motifs reveal affinities with medieval ceramics from Teruel, Barcelona, Triana, and Talavera, Granada's ceramics developed an unmistakable identity. In a lecture delivered at the Ateneo de Madrid in 1917, Manuel Gómez Moreno highlighted, defined, and introduced this distinctive tradition into the field of artistic scholarship.[28]

Clays extracted from the rivers Beiro and Fargue, mixed with water from the Acequia de Aynadamar, gave substance to a highly characteristic ceramic tradition. The pieces were shaped on a recessed-wheel potter's wheel and glazed over a tin-white ground, employing shades of stone blue, cobalt blue, copper green, and, to a lesser extent, manganese red and, more recently, yellow. A stylization of natural motifs acquired a particular charm through the agility of the brushwork—executed with a highly distinctive angled-bristle brush—the economy of means, the spontaneity of freehand painting, and a certain Nasrid flavour that Christian potters continued to preserve after the conquest.

No surname is more closely associated with Granada's ceramics than Morales. The Morales family, whose earliest documented connection with pottery dates to 1517, branched into dynasties such as Morales Alguacil, Morales Moreno, Muñoz Morales, and Contreras Morales. One of these branches, represented in the nineteenth century by Manuel Nicomedes Morales and in the twentieth century by Cecilio Morales Moreno, decided to incorporate the name Fajalauza into its commercial identity. Manuel Nicomedes Morales's pottery factory was originally known as El Arco; it later became Viuda eHijos de Manuel Morales and subsequently Fábrica de Vidriado San Antonio operating from two sites that brought together Manuel's inheritance at Puerta de Fajalauza and that of his wife at the former Convento de San Antonio. The change of name was suggested by Natalio Rivas and Luis Seco, who recognized the potential strength of a designation that had already gained popular currency and was evolving from a geographical reference to a cluster of kilns into a term increasingly identified with the city itself.[29]

Today, the Alfar de Fajalauza remains one of the most extraordinary surviving workshops in Granada, preserving—alongside industrial innovations—kilns, potters' wheels, and tools dating at least to the eighteenth century. Its successful participation in the Expositión Universellede Bruxelles of 1910 and the Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla of 1929 firmly established the association

between its production and the city of Granada. At present, a foundation[30] promoted by some of the descendants of the family seeks to preserve the workshop, maintain production, and safeguard its legacy through a range of initiatives focused on research, dissemination, continued manufacture, and public engagement.

One particularly evocative example is the project "Memorias del Barro,"[31] an undertaking situated somewhere between exhibition practice, research, community art, and dialogical engagement. At its core, participants are invited to contribute pieces of Fajalauza pottery from their personal collections, accompanied by stories of their lives, contexts of use, and personal memories. These narratives integrate places, people, smells, flavours, and experiences associated with the objects. Through this initiative, Fundación Fajalauza has successfully fostered a form of interaction that also occurs around many Cruces de Mayo displays. Visitors engage in conversation, recognize familiar pieces, connect what they see with objects they themselves own, and thereby generate an immediate process of heritage valuation of considerable significance. Such exchanges also trigger memories, practices, customs, and associated ideas that are collectively shared.

Many other kilns were devoted to what practitioners often prefer to call Granadan ceramics for obvious reasons. These included workshops such as Del Álamo, Viuda de Martínez, La Campana, that of Chacho José, El Sol, Las Tinajeras, and San Isidro. The latter, owned by Manuel Morales Alonso, was established in 1923 in the area of the Eras del Cristo and developed a highly distinctive production, particularly in cuerda seca ceramics. After passing into the hands of several of his sons, the factory relocated to the Carretera de Jaén in 1966 and underwent major technical modernization. In 2019, the children of Agustín Morales Alguacil donated to the Universidad de Granada an important legacy consisting of more than four hundred objects from their father's collection and from Fábricas San Isidro, including ceramic works and heritage materials associated with the workshops and the history of the factory.

Fajalauza and San Isidro would ultimately be the only two ceramic enterprises to survive the Spanish Civil War. The Blas Casares workshop was founded in 1941 and became known for its fine reproductions and reinterpretations of eighteenth-century ceramics. From the 1960s onwards, the number of workshops increased significantly, largely driven by former students of the Escuela de Artes Aplicadas y Oficios Artísticos de Granada who had studied under Cecilio Morales or had received training linked to San Isidro. These new workshops emerged at a time when ceramics had already lost much of their traditional domestic function; consequently, they oriented their production from the outset toward a different clientele whose preferences shaped both forms and decoration. Founded in 1988, Cerámica Los Arrayanes provides a notable example of the modernization of traditional proposals, particularly in its use of colour.

Despite the crisis brought about by the appearance of inexpensive and durable alternative materials for domestic use, the prohibition of certain substances that had been essential to ceramic production, and urban redevelopment processes that transformed former kiln and factory districts, Fajalauza pottery survived. More through the force of circumstance than through

institutional policies, it became a powerful symbol of identity for the former Kingdom of Granada and especially for its capital city. Even today, a walk through Granada reveals the constant presence of this ceramic tradition. Visitors quickly encounter examples ranging from street-name plaques to flowerpots, planters, dishes, and platters that sometimes decorate entire façades. The use of Fajalauza ceramics for street signage is not a recent phenomenon: it dates back to the late eighteenth century, when urban street names were physically incorporated into the cityscape following the *Mapa Topográfico* prepared by Francisco Dalmau in 1796, some examples of which remain in their original locations.

Twentieth-century Fajalauza ceramics abound in Cruces de Mayo displays, although exceptional pieces from the preceding century—particularly *lebrillos*, *semillanos*, and domestic serving dishes—are not uncommon. Trained eyes can distinguish among still-life arrangements the old glazes with their characteristic greyish eighteenth-century blue tones, the pieces that workshop painters referred to as *populares*" characterized by extensive white backgrounds and isolated motifs executed with rapid, expressive brushwork, and the *repintadas*, whose more elaborate decoration covers a greater portion of the surface. This unique annual exhibition, where local residents often guide visitors through the subtleties of the celebration—inevitably explaining *el pero*" (the existence of an apple variety known in Spanish as *pero* allows for a play on words associated with an image of considerable visual power and distinctiveness. The inclusion in the display of the crosses of an apple, or *pero*, pierced by a pair of scissors has become a recurring feature. The image evokes the idea of "cutting the *pero*" a wordplay that exploits the fact that pero is also the Spanish adversative conjunction meaning "but". The symbol thus conveys the idea of "cutting out any buts", that is, pre-empting or eliminating any possible objection to the design)—undoubtedly has an impact on ceramic sales, although no study has yet measured it. There has, however, been no significant development of ceramic production specifically linked to the festival itself, nor are dedicated sales stalls organized for this purpose. The same applies to most of the other crafts displayed on the altars, with the notable exception of carnations, which are now sold both in natural form and as textile or ceramic reproductions intended as souvenirs.

The importance of Granada ceramics within Cruces de Mayo displays is evident even in the incorporation of simulated ceramic elements. In the Realejo district, for example, façades decorated by the couple Trini and José Mari—long involved in neighbourhood activities—have featured painted cardboard trays reproducing the forms and colours of traditional Fajalauza pottery. These substitutes were installed in areas where original pieces might be vulnerable to damage or theft. In the Cruz display organized by the Hermandad de la Aurora, mentioned above, this phenomenon reached an entirely different scale, with the controversial inclusion of enormous "Fajalauza" plates reproduced in wood and mounted on metal supports. These featured painted architectural views of religious buildings associated with the history of the brotherhood. As early as 1988, a cross erected at the same location had prominently featured a gigantic simulated Fajalauza water jug complete with a functioning fountain (**Fig. 10**).



Fig. 10. May Cross of the Brotherhood of the Aurora on Paseo de los Tristes. 2026. Source: Estrella Villegas.

The process of identity formation outlined above, together with the display of ceramics in festive contexts, has encouraged appreciation for antique pieces—reflected in their rising value on the antiques market—and stimulated demand for newly produced ceramics. Fundación Fajalauza and the Universidad de Granada signed a collaborative agreement to undertake the research project "*La cerámica de Fajalauza como patrimonio y seña de identidad de Granada,*" directed by José María Martín Civantos, although no published results are yet available. Signs of this growing sense of identity are nevertheless evident. The graphic language and characteristic blue of Fajalauza ceramics have entered the world of design. In June 2018, when the Granada-based company Tostaderos Sol de Alba launched its Pipas Granaínas, the packaging incorporated motifs clearly inspired by Fajalauza ceramics. The consumption of sunflower seeds as a snack, deeply rooted in everyday Spanish habits, also provides interesting examples of the relationship between commercial design and cultural identity. The incorporation of motifs inspired by traditional ceramics into packaging represents a deliberate means of identification with a particular aesthetic and, through it, with a broader cultural and territorial imaginary. Packaging thus moves beyond a purely commercial function to become a vehicle for visual references associated with tradition, identity, and geographical provenance. In 2022, the artist Jorge Marín Montoya designed the Holy Week poster for the Hermandad de la Aurora using a tiled panel decorated with classic Fajalauza imagery as its support. Earlier still, the Hermandad del Vía Crucis had incorporated Fajalauza ceramics into the side vents of the paso of the Cristo de la Amargura, where they remained until 1989. Similar references are now common in both fashion and jewellery design, where ceramic motifs function as instantly recognizable references to Granada.

The absence of precise regulation and of effective knowledge-transfer strategies capable of communicating the characteristics of genuinely handcrafted pieces has encouraged the proliferation of shops marketing ceramics produced elsewhere—particularly in China—as Fajalauza ware. While such products may appear authentic to uninformed consumers, they rely on mass-production techniques and materials that allow prices far below those of locally produced handcrafted ceramics, satisfying what might be termed the superficial expectations of the average tourist. This phenomenon is not unique to ceramics, but it has affected this sector with particular intensity.

The creation in 2021 of the Cátedra de Innovación en Artesanía, Diseño y Arte Contemporáneo at the Universidad de Granada under the direction of Ana García López[32] may contribute to stimulating reflection on craftsmanship and its possibilities for development, while presenting initiatives and experiences drawn from other countries and exploring new approaches and proposals.

The impact of the Fiesta de la Cruz on tourism in Granada is highly significant. It dramatically increases accommodation bookings at the beginning of May, taking advantage of a holiday period that combines 1 May with the regional holiday of 2 May in the Comunidad de Madrid, generating substantial visitor flows toward Granada. The celebration is also becoming increasingly important within the itineraries of international tourists.

Two dynamics, one internal and the other external, converge around the festival, offering considerable potential for the development of craftsmanship and directly engaging with tourism as a possible driver of that development.

Looking inward, the city adorns and rediscovers itself while simultaneously showcasing its craftsmanship, which becomes a powerful marker of identity. The people of Granada can take pride in an artistic and craft tradition with centuries of history that remains alive today, in some cases almost miraculously so. Yet this emotional and intuitive sense of pride can be transformed into a deeper appreciation if craftspeople are given an explicit presence within the festival; if educational initiatives are developed around techniques, materials and processes; if policies aimed at enhancing the recognition and status of craftwork are pursued by establishing links with local museums and exhibition spaces; if collectors are engaged; and if, by taking advantage of the proximity of schools, these initiatives can find their way into the classroom. A more informed appreciation would also foster a better understanding of the value and pricing of craftsmanship, while providing stronger arguments with which to confront pseudo-craft products, copies and imitations.

At the same time, it is essential to develop strategies that strengthen the communal and collaborative character of the festival, encouraging the participation of neighbourhoods and residents' associations, whose members should be able to enjoy the event rather than merely contribute their labour for the enjoyment of others. It will also be necessary to identify and address those factors that discourage participation, providing flexible and efficient administrative solutions and shaping regulations, above all, so as to prevent the festival from losing its essential character. What is complementary, such as food and drink

stalls, should not become central, while the traditional altar de la cruz is relegated to a merely incidental role.

Looking outward, the festival offers visitors an exceptional and immersive showcase. For a few hours, they can enter an ephemeral artistic world and may wish to contribute to its continuity by taking away something more than a simple souvenir: first-hand experience of a workshop, an understanding of a particular technique, an awareness that they are contributing to the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage and, perhaps, a handcrafted object in which all these dimensions of the experience are brought together.

It therefore seems essential to adopt a cross-sectoral approach to ensure that the benefits arising from large visitor numbers and from the festival's incorporation into tourist circuits effectively reach the craftspeople and the creative community that make this heritage possible. The challenge lies not simply in attracting visitors, but in transforming part of the economic value generated by the festival into social, cultural and economic value for those who keep alive the crafts and skills that give it its distinctive character. Viewed through the lens of cultural heritage, the festival can thus operate as a chain of value transformation.

As in the brilliant floral paintings and Baroque still lifes that appear dazzling at first glance, one must look beyond the immediate impression and pay attention to the fallen petals at the base of the vase, the hidden butterfly, or the fly perched upon the most tempting delicacy. Only then can one appreciate that the threat of decline is always present. For this reason, this article has deliberately refrained from introducing *el pero y las tijeras.*

NOTES

[1] Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

[2] Julio Caro Baroja, *La estación del amor: fiestas de mayo a San Juan* (Madrid: Taurus, 1979).

[3] José A. González Alcantud, "El día de la Cruz en Granada. Introducción etnológica," *Gaceta de Antropología* 7 (1990); Juan José Montijano Ruiz, *La Cruz de Mayo en Granada* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2023).

[4] González Alcantud, "El día de la Cruz en Granada," 34.

[5] Miguel Jiménez Monteserin and Santiago Torralba Hernáiz, *Ciudades vistas y soñadas. La mirada sobre España de los viajeros románticos del XIX* (Cuenca: Real Academia Conquense de Artes y Letras, 2021).

[6] Ana Moreno Garrido, "El Patronato Nacional de Turismo (1928–1932). Balance económico de una política turística," *Investigaciones de Historia Económica* 6, no. 18 (2010).

[7] Fernando Moreno Cuadro, "Humanismo y arte efímero: la canonización de San Fernando," *Traza y Baza: Cuadernos Hispanos de Simbología, Arte y Literatura* 9 (1985): 21–98.

[8] Nazario Aguilar Montes and Manuel Canivell Achabal, "El arte de lo efímero: altares de cultos," in *Amor (1618–2018)*, ed. Amparo Rodríguez Babío (Seville: Primitiva Archicofradía Pontificia y Real Hermandad de Nazarenos de la Sagrada Entrada de Jesús en Jerusalén, Santísimo Cristo del Amor, Nuestra Señora del Socorro y Santiago Apóstol, 2018), 347–372.

[9] Gabriel Pozo Felguera, "El corral de vecinos que surgió en Granada en el XVI y Madrid rebautizó como corrala," *El Independiente de Granada*, September 25, 2022; see also Carlos Jerez Mir,

"Granada: la arquitectura doméstica de la ciudad cristiana," in *La casa: espacios domésticos, modos de habitar*, ed. Juan Calatrava (Madrid: Abada, 2019), 218–29.
[10] Juan José Montijano Ruiz, *La Cruz de Mayo en Granada*, chap. 3, sec. I.
[11] Juan José Montijano Ruiz, *La Cruz de Mayo en Granada*, chap. 2.
[12] Jorge Garrido López, "Artesanía al final de la Edad Media en Granada: una aproximación," *Arqueología y Territorio* 17 (2020): 173–88.
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