

PASSAGE I

Alex Atala and Brazilian Cuisine

At first,¹ Brazilian chef Alex Atala opened his restaurant in São Paulo in 1999, people told him he'd never succeed. In a country where European cuisine was held in the highest regard, they said, no one would patronize a restaurant serving Brazilian food. Atala, whose restaurant has consistently ranked among the world's best, has long disproven the naysayers. Using traditional Brazilian ingredients, such as,² manioc root² and even ants—in innovative ways, he has thrilled³ diners from around the world.

Still, Atala felt he could do more for his country and its cuisine.⁴ In 2012, he founded Instituto Atá to help promote lesser-known ingredients, particularly those of the Amazon basin, while working to protect Brazil's biodiversity. Hearts of palm, for example, were typically harvested from Brazil's wild juçara palms in an unsustainable way. Needing eight years to mature, the tree dies once its⁵ large heart is removed. Atala began persuading producers to cultivate Amazonian pupunha palms, which grow clusters of stems, each with a small heart. Careful harvesting ensures that the tree will live to yield⁶ more hearts, resulting in environmentally friendly production.

Atala prioritizes his working relationships with Amazonian tribes. Utilizing their historical know-how they⁷ have,⁷ he aims to bolster tribe members' livelihoods while exposing a wider audience to Brazilian ingredients. For instance, Baniwa women have farmed distinctly flavorful chili peppers for centuries that⁸ use⁸ indigenous agricultural techniques, to create a seasoning called pimenta jiquitaia. Partnering with Instituto Atá have enabled⁹ these women from a remote rain forest region to scale up production and market their product globally.

Expanding awareness of the rich diversity of Brazil's native ingredients, Atala continues to lead in deciphering¹⁰ the country's food culture. With his characteristic passion and intensity, the renowned chef seeks to inspire Brazilians to rediscover the connections between culture, nature, and food.

PASSAGE II

Rediscovering Hrosvitha

Hrosvitha, a medieval author and dramatist¹¹—is one of the earliest known European women playwrights. Although little is known about her life, scholars agree Hrosvitha was born to a noble family around 935 CE. As a relation of Holy Roman Emperor Otto I, she most likely spent her early years as part of his court. Later, sometime before 959 CE, she entered the abbey at Gandersheim, it was well known as a significant center of¹² learning.

Hrosvitha entered Gandersheim as a canoness rather than a nun. Her title did not require a vow of poverty, but Hrosvitha did take the abbey's customary vow of chastity, which absolved her of an obligation to marry. This circumstance made it okay for her to keep¹³ her financial status without incurring responsibilities to a husband and children. Nevertheless,¹⁴ Hrosvitha had a greater level of independence—she could acquire property, receive guests, employ servants, and visit the royal court—than most women of her time.

Hrosvitha produced at least eight narrative religious poems, two historical epics (about the court of Otto I¹⁵ and Gandersheim), and six comedy-dramas. It is for these dramas that she is best known today.

PASSAGE III

A Musical Detour

[1]

Every night while driving home from a hectic day at work, my three-year-old twins quarreling in the backseat, I take a short detour. I turn off the gridlocked highway, onto a stretch of Route 66 that is,¹⁶ surrounded by arid New Mexico hills. When we're nearly three miles into our detour, I roll down the windows. Looking pointedly into the rearview mirror, windows rolled down,¹⁷ I say something about not throwing anything out of the car, but neither boy is listening. I check my speed. [A] Carefully, I steer toward the fog line. "Here it is, boys!" I yell at the backseat, the passenger-side tires finding the rumble strips etched into the asphalt.

[2]

Normal rumble strips create that loud, grating noise when you drive over them—like a built-in alarm for¹⁸ drivers who drift too close to the road's edge. These strips are different. The boys abruptly stop their squalling as the car begins to vibrate. Then, instead of that jolting warning noise, we hear the distinct strain of the song "America the Beautiful." [B] The road is playing us a song.

[3]

I've been taking this detour out of Albuquerque for two years, ever since these musical rumble strips were¹⁹ installed. City planners wanted to find out whether the novelty of hearing a snippet of song would give drivers an incentive to obey the speed limit; the tune is only recognizable if they're going a reasonable forty-five miles per hour. Whether this strategy works, I don't know. [C] For me, this brief musical interlude is a charming curiosity, a welcome interruption in my work-week slog. Even though constant traffic has worn down the musical rumble strips and warped the sound of some of the notes, there are currently no²⁰ plans to restore the strips.

[4]

After the last one of the notes fades²¹ into the darkening sky, I glance back at the boys, who have been²² lulled by the wonder of the song. [D] I stop worrying about work, about how many toy cars might have gotten lost between there and home. Until then, I feel like everything is going to be just fine. **24**

PASSAGE IV

The Case for Visible Storage

[1]

Public museums exist for two main reasons: to educate the public and provide stewardship (legal and ethical management, care, documentation, and use)²⁶ of their collections. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, a typical museum only exhibits about ten percent of the items in its collection; the other ninety percent remains in storage. When displaying²⁷ such a small portion of artifacts severely limits public access and therefore public education. Furthermore, maintaining such a large number of artifacts in storage while acquiring additional items makes finding enough suitable storage space difficult, especially for delicate items. [A]

[2]

To remain true to the goals of education and stewardship, museums should dedicate public access space to visible storage. [B] Also known as open storage, visible storage provides²⁸ ways to display many items in small or irregular spaces, allowing more artifacts to be on exhibit. [C]

[3]

In a traditional museum display, each artifact is labeled and positioned at eye level with plenty of space between it and the other objects. Subsequently,³⁰ artifacts in visible storage spaces are placed close together²⁹ and are often displayed from floor to ceiling with few labels. Areas of a museum that cannot house a traditional display, therefore, might be ideal for a visible storage display. Ceramic pottery where it might³¹ otherwise be positioned in individual glass cases might be lined up on shelves behind a glass wall. An antique fork and spoon fastened to a large informational board might instead be part of an entire set of silverware arranged under glass in pull-out cabinet drawers. [D]

[4]

While some artifacts can never be displayed³², many pieces that can—and should—³³ be viewed are not. Whereas³⁴ a museum designates areas for visible storage, it uses space efficiently, providing safe displays for artifacts and allowing visitors greater access to independently study the works that make the museum unique.

PASSAGE V

The Sociable Weavers' Complex Nest

In the sparse yet relatively green environment of the Kalahari Desert, birds known as sociable weavers build their enormous nests atop the desert's signature camelthorn trees. Slung across the branches, each nest—which can measure up to thirteen feet wide and seven feet thick—is a sprawling community home to hundreds of birds. ³⁶

A weaver nest does not resemble a common bowl-like bird nest. Although the weavers use typical materials such as sticks, grass, and feathers to construct their nests, the nests look more like disorganized piles. Built within each nest are as many as one hundred ³⁷ four-to-six-inch-wide chambers. A bird enters a chamber by flying to the underside of the nest, it squeezes through a one-inch-wide entrance hole, and continuing up a ³⁸ passageway a chamber. In each chamber, up to five of the sparrow-sized birds can huddle as a group together when the Kalahari nights get cold. ³⁹

The multi-chamber construction of the weaver nest has drawn comparisons to that of an apartment building. Indeed, the nests exemplify communal living at there most ⁴⁰ effective. Each one houses multiple generations of birds, all of whom work together to maintain their home.

PASSAGE VI

The Artful Stitch of *Paj Ntaub*

She depicts flowers with layers of petals, intricate spirals and rosettes, teardrops bending within circles, and dizzying mazes of lines⁴¹—embroidering them in vibrant reds, blues, pinks, yellows, and greens on fabric of delicate silk or cotton. Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun is a master of *paj ntaub*, or “flower cloth” embroidery, the most difficult of the century’s-oldest Hmong needlework arts. *Paj ntaub* is increasingly made in lighter, softer shades today.⁴² She’s been creating stitched textiles since she was a young woman living in ⁴³ northern Laos. For the past several decades, she’s been designing *paj ntaub* in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she also teaches her craft.

Flower cloth (commonly as a shirt, dress, coat, or collar)⁴⁴ is made to be worn as clothing and, depending on the amount of needlework on the piece, is designed either for everyday wear or for a special occasion. With pattern names such as “elephant’s foot” and “snail house” and images of animals framed by geometric designs, *paj ntaub* patterns are versatile.⁴⁵ What distinguishes *paj ntaub* from other Hmong needlework arts are the artist’s use of tiny, tight stitches and several complex techniques. One technique is reverse appliqué, in which⁴⁶ shapes are cut out from, rather than added on top of, the embroidered fabric. Another is elaborate over stitching: thousands of layered stitches are applied to its surface.⁴⁷ Pang Xiong regrets that most people she knows today wear only regular⁴⁸ clothes. When she was growing up in Laos, she explains, she had few items of clothing, but each garment she owned was handcrafted *paj ntaub*.

However, she⁴⁹ still wears flower cloth every day and would like to inspire others to do so. Pang Xiong teaches *paj ntaub* in art museums—including at the Smithsonian Institution, where some of her textiles are on permanent display—and in community settings around Philadelphia. **50** Pang Xiong is showing a new generation the joys of *paj ntaub* and beautiful handcrafted clothing.