

Goals: source raw materials, train disabled artisans, encourage our local project leaders, find local trustees, scope out potential new land, find outlets in Quito & Mindo.

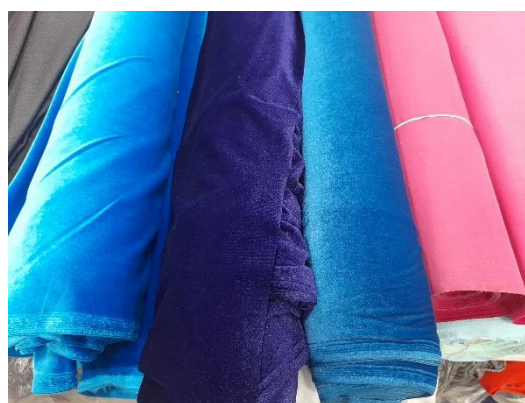
Day 1: After 25 hours on the move, it's so good to be here and see our Ecuadorian project leaders in person at last, after almost 2 years of the pandemic keeping us all apart, working remotely. We've already found our first fabric wholesaler, spotted on our way into the city from the airport, which is a massive encouragement as helping to source the right types of fabrics for printing on is one of the primary goals for my visit. Tomorrow we'll hit the streets of Quito in search of fabrics, beads and other materials, all in preparation for our new product ranges being launched at Top Drawer trade show in London next month. Then a 3 hour drive to our project site at Santo Domingo for the next few days. Can't wait to see our artisans again and do some in-person training with them too!



Day 2:

It's been an incredible day. We have literally been in bead heaven!! We found this superb supplier just 500m from our guest house and spent 2 hours sourcing every colour of bead, clasp, thread, pom-pom trim etc imaginable. We will seriously have our work

cut out cataloguing it all when we get to Santo Domingo. Every single bead & clasp & thread etc has to be weighed and priced, so we can calculate prices correctly for our finished prototypes. Then we walked for hours searching for fabrics, ecstatic to find 100% cotton cloth at last, although not yet all the colours we need. Such a busy day we didn't stop for lunch till 4. Got back to our hostel this evening a bit shattered but happy & thankful for a very fruitful day.



### Day 3:

After a very early start buying beads to make these prototype bracelet trios, we had a perplexing morning visiting textile factories on the outskirts - which all defied logic by being more expensive than the cheapest retail supplier we'd found in the city centre yesterday. So, back to the streets of Quito we went on foot, to purchase almost 100m of brightly coloured cotton gabardine cloth for screen printing & denim for making bags. A search for coloured envelopes and fabric dye both proved fruitless, so we will have to continue the quest in Santo Domingo. We'll finally be on our way there tomorrow morning! Really looking forward to the next 6 days spending valuable time with our 21 artisans there, before heading back to Quito to re-establish links with our local market here.



#### Day 4:

The journey from Quito to Santo Domingo is 3 hours of helter-skelter downhill road filled with kamikaze trucks, winding it's way through tropical green mountains. It is as hair-raising as it is beautiful. Despite the baking heat and extreme humidity at this low altitude, I could not have had a happier heart as we arrived at last. Having unloaded all our equipment & materials at Artizan's Ecuador HQ here, in a rural spot 20 minutes outside the city, we set off to see Linver, one of our artisans who makes beautiful hand-made paper into stunning cards. It was fantastic to see him and his family again! Teaching him to screen-print, using the adapted equipment Carlos & Jessica had sourced for him, was a great joy. He's clearly going to be a brilliant printer.



#### Day 5:

Spending time with our artisans here, being welcomed into their homes so warmly and having the privilege of sharing skills with them, fills the heart. Yesterday we visited Federico, Adolfo, Pedro & Mauro and their families, training 3 of them in screen printing and being awed by the perfection of Pedro and Federico's paper-making. It was so, so good to be together. The time since I last saw them all in person has been fraught with difficulties and so many challenges, due to the pandemic. Together we shared our hopes for the year ahead. Diversifying the skills they have should lead to new markets and many more sales for their crafts. As we prepare for Top Drawer exhibition in London next month, its great to see the high quality of their work and see how quickly they're taking to the new skills. We pray we'll get many new outlets this year, as this is what we really need. When you buy something from Artizan International you're giving hope and an income to the person who made it., as well as bringing a beautiful thing into your life.





Day 6: A day of joys and also heart-break, culminating in Carlos & I having to wade through knee-deep floodwater in the semi-darkness to get back to our van, after a river broke its banks as we were visiting our final artisan of the day. To begin with the joys: First stop was Jose, who makes cards, paper beads and also Tagua jewellery ('vegetable ivory'), as well as being a talented welder and innovative wheelchair maker. A multi-talented man, he is rightly proud of his handmade wheelchair. Next was Stephen, who's got married since I was last here. He's incredibly bright and learns new skills at the speed of light. By the time we'd printed our first length of cloth together he was already

asking about how to print much bigger pieces, suggesting design motifs and ambitious fabric-printing projects. Then Ramon, a total super-star and one of the very first people we trained in paper-making. Ramon was a huge help to our UK volunteers whilst they were here, really looking after them and encouraging them when times were tough. It was wonderful to see him & his family again. Our next visit was to Andres, a big-hearted man with a jovial spirit, even though he was in bed with a bone-infection and unable to move much. His three young children clambered



about him adoringly as he told us about his many struggles, frequently managing to smile through it all. We promised to find a doctor who could visit him at home and help him recover as quickly



as possible. Like Jose, he's a great innovator and proudly had his partner show us the

paper-pulping machine and the three-wheeled motorbike he'd made. He tearfully thanked everyone who'd made it possible for us to provide him with welding equipment before the pandemic, and offered to donate his hand-bike wheelchair to whoever needs one, now that he has made his motorised one. I had to hold back my tears too hearing this, deeply touched as the whole family live in one small room and clearly could benefit from selling it. Instead, thanks to his generous heart, one of our other artisans will be over the moon to have it.



Our final visit was to Luis, a talented paper-maker, who became sick a few months ago and has yet to recover, spending all his days lying in bed barely able to move. He had a biopsy many weeks ago but is still awaiting the results, as the hospitals are completely over-run with covid patients. Carlos told me with great frustration that whenever he calls the doctor he just says to wait for the results. Until they come, there's literally nothing that can be done. He doesn't even have a prescription. Frighteningly thin, with one hand horribly burnt, he was a heart-breaking sight. His neighbours had failed to pay their bills so his electricity got cut off as well, forcing him to use candles as his only light. He fell asleep and couldn't feel that his hand was in the flame, as his spinal injury has robbed him of feeling in that hand. By the time he woke up, the damage was done. I couldn't help but weep as he shared all this with us. He has no appetite but we begged

him to eat and finally he said he'd like some powdered vitamin drink, so we climbed in the van and went in search of some, coming back in the dwindling light with 3 big tins of it, bottled water, juice & fruit to tempt him to eat. "Artizan are my family who care for me..." he said, as I went in search of a cup and spoon in the darkness of his makeshift kitchen, although I could barely hear him above the torrential rain on the tin roof. Before he'd finished speaking there were shouts from outside. The river had burst its banks and our small van was in danger of being swept away. To get to it we had to plunge into the rising waters, trying not to see the unmentionables floating around us. As soon as we were on higher ground, we stopped to wash off the worst of it in the rain. The bright point on the way home was stopping off at Carlos' mother's house for him to get some clean clothes. Despite the state I was in, she gave me a hugest of hugs. Those of you who do, please pray for a Luis. I held his hand and said a quick prayer with him before we left, as the waters raged outside. I'm so grateful for Carlos & Jessica's deep compassion for all the artisans they serve. They'll be visiting him regularly to make sure he's eating. I made him promise he'd be fatter by the time I come back next time. I hope and pray he's here.

Day 7:

Teaching our 4th group of differently-able artisans has been utterly brilliant, they are such a talented bunch! In the last two days they've learnt new jewellery designs & textiles products a-plenty, and have had fun in the process. The mutually-supportive community they've become is a wonderful thing to experience. Previously working apart for many months due to the pandemic, they loved being together at last, and we loved teaching them. Jessi was a fantastic co-teacher, and Carlos valiantly ferried everyone back and forth to their homes, scattered all over Santo Domingo. In one part of town he told me how he'd once had a gun held to his head by a thief in broad daylight. Understandably nervous to be there, he forged ahead nonetheless so that no-one was left out, since one of our artisans lives just there.



It was phenomenally helpful to teach them in person at last, rather than via videos they watch on tiny screens, or instructions sent via email. Great to be able to see who thrives as which particular craft, so we can plan their work to suit each person best. I was massively impressed at how quickly they took to all the new skills. I just wish I could stay longer, as there's still so many things I need to teach them. Hopefully I can come



back soon.







We want to say a \*huge thank you\* to everyone who helped provide the special sewing machines for our artisans, they absolutely love using them! (The special thing about these machines is you don't need a foot pedal to be able to use them). It's so empowering to be able to do something skilled, when the world has previously viewed you as someone without potential.

Harrogate-ites : next time you pass the Artizan shop on Oxford Street, you'll know who's made the products in the window.

Day 8:

The journey to Frixon's house, on his family's homestead in the forest an hour outside the city, is unimaginably beautiful. Once we left the road, we abandoned the minibus

and had to hike & scramble the rest of the way. The only way for Frixon to get there is to be carried in a hammock. As the house itself is on tall stilts accessed by a bamboo ladder, once he's in it there's no easy way of leaving it. For a young man of 22, I can only imagine how hard this must be for him at times.

Thanks to those who enabled us to buy him an adapted sewing machine, at least he now has creative work to do & a way of earning an income. He's a very fast learner, so teaching him to make these new textiles products from stunning Ecuadorian cloth was a joy, despite the intense heat. He's already sent photos of his first items completed right after we left ! 😊 You'll be able to find his work in our shop and online in a few weeks time.



Day 9:

My final couple of days here were spent meeting with potential local trustees ( I'm delighted to say we have found two excellent ones so far), viewing potential plots of



land for our future crafts training centre, and searching for outlets for our products in Quito, the capital.

Finding local trustees who truly share the vision is essential, so we can be an effective team, working harmoniously together towards the same goal of creating transformation in the lives of those we serve. That's what matters above all.



In Quito, as in Mindo, the reception we got when showing our sample cards was truly encouraging. We were sad to find two of our previous outlets there had been wiped out by the pandemic, but others had reopened their doors and we found some new ones too.

Saying goodbye to Carlos & Jessica was really hard, our time together has been as precious as it was fruitful. They are truly a brilliant couple, hard-working and committed,



passionate about serving the artisans and true friends to all of them. I was so impressed by them, always so positive and caring, even at the end of exhausting days. With so much to cover in so little time on this visit, I will have to return again later this year. So, I'm glad to say it won't be too long before we see one another again.



Thank you so much to everyone who's engaged with these posts and encouraged us. I'm planning to take a team of volunteers to visit our Ecuador project next year, so if you'd like to come and "join the journey" do get in touch, or watch this space for more details soon. Carlos, Jessi & I will be delighted to have you onboard.