Rosario Ratzán’s colorful designs and intricate beadwork and embroidery are inspired by her father’s heritage as a respected painter of the Mayan Tz’utujil community. Ratzán’s mother, a master embroiderer and weaver of huipiles (traditional dresses) taught her the techniques handed down through her family. After armed conflict made traveling to the city to sell his paintings too dangerous, her father began creating crafts that combined her mother’s knowledge with the inspiration of his paintings. These new designs based on traditional knowledge and artistic inspiration form the basis of Rosario’s collection.

The vast majority of materials are purchased locally, such as thread and mostacilla, many being repurposed from other items. Plastic tubing for beadwork is sourced from the scrap of plumbers and wire for waist looms from local bicycle repair shops. The only thing purchased outside of the community is the leather used for jewelry. Rosario and her father create the initial designs for jewelry, which are then tested by a small group of artisans. If the design is a success, a group of local craftspeople begins work replicating the items. Each huipil is a unique design that is made by a single person.

By incorporating her father’s knowledge of native art with her mother’s talent in traditional embroidery, Rosario is helping to bring the colors of her community to a wider audience. Their crafts employ more than 80 people in the Tz’utujil Mayan community of Santiago Atitlán, Sololá, Guatemala.