Hand-carved and hand-painted, Oaxacan woodcarvings are the most sought-after folk art in Mexico. Sometimes referred to as “alebrijes,” the carvings make irresistible souvenirs for travelers to Mexico. Through sites like Viva Oaxaca, they are a prime catch for discerning, online shoppers who follow the “buy handmade” movement. Often signed by the artists, the carvings are especially popular with collectors, who prize their one-of-a-kind originality. Noted for their brilliant colors and fine craftsmanship, the figures attest to the talent, imagination and flair of the region’s renowned carvers.

The makers of these inspiring sculptures are proud descendants of the pre-Columbian, Zapotec culture, living in Mexico’s southern state of Oaxaca (pronounced wah-HAH-kah). The popularity of these figures dates back to the 1980s when folk art enthusiasts discovered and championed woodworker Manuel Jimenez, who lived in the village of Arrazola. Now, some 200 families in the Oaxaca valley are carving to meet the vast demand for this art. They make their figures from the twisted branches of the copalillo tree, which grows on the hills nearby. The wood is lightweight, easily workable, and sands to a smooth finish. The workers chop at cut branches with machetes, then sculpt the finer details with pocketknives. Woodcarving is often a family affair — children help with sanding, while wives paint the vivid, detailed patterns. The carvers’ inspirations come from many places, including their dreams and superstitions, from the brilliant colors of their fiestas, or the dazzling wildflowers that grow in the desert.

Oaxacan woodcarvings are fine examples of Mexico’s rich, “made-by-hand” artistic tradition. View our website galleries to see carvings by many renowned artists, including Mario Castellanos, Arsenio Morales, Lauro Ramirez, Ariel Playas, the Blas family and the Tribus Mixes collective.
Bringing Mexico's acclaimed artistic traditions to the world!

We specialize in Oaxacan wood carvings, tin figures and ornaments, Mexican pottery and Day of the Dead art.

¡Viva Oaxaca!
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