**Herón Martínez Mendoza** of Acatlán de Osorio is a fine example of ceramist extraordinaire. His work has become greatly admired and is sought after by many private collectors, as well as museums.  Particularly intriguing about this artist is the fact that although born to the craft, Martínez initially fought his "calling," but when forced to accept it, he went on to become one of Mexico's truly exceptional artisans in clay.

Serious collectors like to know the "provenance" of the items they are collecting, and with respect to Martínez’s work, they are fortunate. Although many of the best Mexican craftsmen have died leaving behind little information on their backgrounds and inspirations, Martínez's early life and work have been documented by Carlos Espejel, former Director of the Museo Nacional de Artes e Industrias Populares in Mexico City, and folk art writers Lenore Mulryan and Louanna Lackey. Since there is a comparative "wealth" of material relating to Martínez's background and the factors which influenced his creativity, collectors can explore the literature in the bibliography which was compiled by Lee Price Arrellano on the website www.heronmartinez.com  It is definitely worth the effort as a fascinating story is to be found.

**White Period**:

The earlier work, called by some “the white period,” had a white background made of bisque ware and covered with a coat of gesso “blanco” – a chalky looking plaster. These white slip bases were often decorated with acrylic paints in vivid colors, with much of the painting done by Martínez’s wife, Olivia. The choice of materials was very wise as years later, the white retains its clarity, and the colors remain bright. Many of the early trees of life and candelabra were quite large, and although seemingly fragile, a surprising number of them have survived well.

This early work has become particularly collectible. Martínez’s fantastic imagination is evident in the widely varied pieces produced during this period. He seemed to be influenced by everything he saw. He even admitted that his dreams were sources of inspiration. He also commented that his trees of life with religious themes were inspired after viewing religious stamps in an album owned by one of his wife’s relatives. Some of the designs prized by collectors include nativity scenes, the Virgin of Guadalupe, Adam and Eve, the flight into Egypt, and altar pieces for the Day of Kings. Non-religious themes include circus figures, such as trapeze artists stacked on one another’s backs, stacked animals and also charming figures of people holding jugs, animals and birds. Some of the more elaborate pieces are decorated on both sides so they can be used as centerpieces. This “white period” clearly was one of the pinnacles of Martínez’s work.

**Talented Family Members**

Over the years, Martínez involved almost everyone in the family in his taller; even his youngest children helped by painting or modeling small pieces.  They also did other chores, such as bringing food.

Martínez’s wife, Olivía, played a key role in the earlier years by painting the white gesso figures which have become among the most collectible of his work.

Because only one of his children, Vidault, had a desire to continue in his footsteps, Martínez trained other members of his extended family, as well as a few “outsiders” to help fulfill orders.

One of Martínez’s nieces, Elfega Martínez Mendoza, was very talented and won prizes in various competitions.  Another niece, Francesca, also made creative pieces, and his sister, Enedina, was known for a painted figure called the “Sirena.”  All of these talented women have died.

After Martínez’s death in 1978, Vidault carried on in his father’s taller for several years.  Much of his work was also signed HMM in line with his father’s desire to have work produced in his taller bear his initials.  Later, Vidault decided to sign some pieces with his own initials, VMC.  Years ago, Vidault closed the taller which remains empty.