Mayan Nobel laureate to address the 2012 prophecies in Boulder

2012 and the Long Count calendar

Scholars say that the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar was likely not invented by the Mayans, but it’s become closely associated with the Mayan civilization and is still used by today’s Mayans, who live in parts of Guatemala, Belize and Mexico.

Dates on the Long Count calendar — which begin at the “zero date” when the creation began about 5,000 years ago, according to the Mayans — is divided into five components that are roughly bundled in units of 20: 20 days make up a uinal, 18 uinals make up a tun, 20 tuns make up a katun, and 20 katuns make up a baktun.

For example, the date July 4, 2010, on the internationally used Gregorian calendar would be written as 12.19.17.8.19 — 12 baktuns, 19 katuns, 17 tuns, 8 uinals and 19 days.

Dec. 21, 2012, marks the end of the 13th baktun on the Long Count calendar, which reads 13.0.0.0.0. This date has conjured up a fair amount of apocalyptic, end-of-the-world predictions, but many Mayans argue that such prophecies are false, and that the end of the baktun simply marks a time of great transition.

If you go
What: Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Menchu Tum and her Mayan spiritual elders, Don Pedro Yae Noj and Dona Faviana Cochoy Alva, will explore the true meaning of the 2012 prophecies

When: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thursday

Where: Naropa University’s Nalanda Campus, 6287 Arapahoe Ave., Boulder

Cost: Tickets cost $195 and can be purchased online

More info: peacejam.org

The movie “2012,” released last year, is an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world. Fireballs rain down. Earth cracks open, swallowing highways and houses. Skyscrapers crumble. A giant waves crash over the high peaks of the Himalayas.

The movie is based on the notion that the Mayan calendar predicts the end of the world on Dec. 21, 2012. The movie is just one of a number of doomsday prophecies based on the end of the 13th baktun (each baktun equals approximately 144,000 days) on the Mayan calendar.

But these interpretations are based more in pop culture than in reality, according to Rigoberta Menchu Tum, a Mayan who was raised in the Guatemalan highlands.

Menchu Tum, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work promoting social justice for indigenous people, will be in Boulder on Thursday with two of her spiritual advisers to discuss how Mayan communities interpret the prophecies of 2012. The event is sponsored by PeaceJam, which works to connect Nobel Peace Prize laureates with youth.

“This is happening all over the place. It’s not just in Hollywood, it’s also in academia, and it’s a very sad thing to see,” Mechu Tum said through an interpreter. “It’s a form of manipulation — they’re trying to make people scared. And that’s wrong because the Mayans say the world will not end in 2012. It is the beginning of a new era, and there will be new hope.”

Menchu Tum was also in the Denver area last November to speak at PeaceJam’s annual luncheon. The movie “2012” had just been released and she was peppered with questions about the Mayan calendar. Menchu Tum answered what she could, but promised she’d come back in 2010 with the experts — two of her own spiritual advisers, Don Pedro Yae Noj and Dona Faviana Cochoy Alva.

“This year is the year for preparing the light bearer — this is the year they’re supposed to start helping people prepare for 2012,” said PeaceJam co-founder Dawn Engle. “Two years ago, they wouldn’t have done this.”
Thursday’s event will offer opportunities for people with different levels of understanding about the Mayan calendar to break into separate work groups.

“This is going to be extraordinary. It's unprecedented,” Engle said. “Never before have people been able to sit and ask questions directly to their Mayan elders and be directly answered — unfiltered, unedited, the direct real deal.”

For Menchu Tum, her experience with the Mayan calendar is not an abstract study of her own culture and history.

“The Mayan measurement of time is a great gift. It’s something that I — and my people — use every single day,” Menchu Tum said. “We consult the calendar to learn where the energy is for the day. It's very complicated, but when you know how to read the calendar, it really becomes a guide to you. It shows each individual how to live and balance and make the most of the day.”

Even though Menchu Tum is adamant that the world will not end, she does believe that whatever transition is coming could be difficult.

“We’re in a period as we approach 2012 when things are dissolving because time is dissolving and we are going to enter a new era when time begins — not just for Mayans but for all people,” Menchu Tum said. “It’s going to be a time of change and maybe chaotic change. It depends on us. It’s up to humanity to decide how well the transition goes.”

Contact Camera Staff Writer Laura Snider at 303-473-1327 or sniderl@dailycamera.com.