

TRANSFORMATION FROM SPECTATOR TO ARTIST



Festival offerings

Story and photos by Rachel-Anne Palacios

June 17, 1997 was the day that my life changed forever. One of my best friends had been hyping my husband and I up for the past couple of months. He was telling us about this wonderful reggae and world music festival that he had gone to in Marysville, CA. "Marysville?" I said, "Reggae in Marysville? Oh, I have got to see this!" Lo and behold, we were driving into a huge open space in the middle of town with all of our camping gear. I had never been to anything like this before and, to tell you the truth, was a little apprehensive at the thought of camping with about 10,000 strangers in the middle of nowhere.

By 5 p.m., everyone had most of their gear set up for what was to be our home for the next three days. As we were setting up, the many different people coming out to the festival surprised me – families, hippies, stoners and regular city folk like myself. We were all ready to relax, dance, party, eat some good food and listen to some excellent live music from acts that I had only heard on CD or vinyl.

We started heading into the concert bowl about six. The

weather was perfect and the smell of the different food vendors permeated the air. As I headed up to the edge of the bowl, I saw an eclectic array of arts and crafts – things that I had never seen before. I have always been interested in cultural arts and anthropology, and was very impressed by the selection of goods for sale. This experience is what inspired me to follow my dreams and pursue my craft. When I returned home from our adventure, I immediately began to figure out how I could start incorporating the arts and crafts pieces that I make into a full-fledged business venture. Seeing all the cultural icons and crafts at friends' houses in my neighborhood while growing up made me want to create raw folk art. I appreciated how real it was and how the handcrafted aspect made them so unique.

In 2001, the transformation began. I quit the administrative job I had been doing for over 10 years and started my art business, Devika's Palacio. I specialize in traditional mendhi – an ancient art practiced in Africa, India and the Middle East for rites of passage, protection and good luck. The hands and feet



Joined hands



Family togetherness

are intricately adorned with a paste made from naturally staining ingredients, such as crushed henna leaves, tamarind paste, coffee, tea, lemon juice, eucalyptus and tea tree oils. The mixture is placed into a small piping bag or applied with a stick; this traditional process is now recognized as modern henna body art.

I also create multi-cultural folk art and crafts. I give thanks to all of the vendors who bring their work to festivals for folks like myself to enjoy and be enlightened by. Using a variety of mediums – from recycled goods to house wares to the human body – I have succeeded in capturing a common thread while also paying tribute to past and present artists. As a community cultural artist, I strive to share my creative visions and experiences on multi-cultural and intergenerational levels. I hope to continue creating a positive focal point for our community by heightening respect for cultural awareness and for our elders. I believe that by learning about each other's cultures and reconnecting with our own heritages, we can reestablish family values, create unity and come together in harmony.

Being a vendor at such a huge event as a festival is amazing. I think it is the ideal place to show your artwork. There are so many different nations represented and you get to share part of your soul with thousands of people. The biggest reward for me is when someone takes home one of my handmade craft items or is super happy with the henna design they chose. Many big ups and blessings come when you have something creative to offer the community. If you ever have the opportunity to display your work at a festival, do it! I guarantee you won't regret it. ☆

Rachel-Anne Palacios is a native of Oakland, CA; a self-taught artist pursuing her dreams. To see and experience more of her art, visit her at www.oaklandartisanmarketplace.org.