

ART IN ACTION

A CREATIVE COLLABORATION AUCTION WITH ROSIES WEARABLE ART

By Sally Lamas

WHAT DO RAVENS, KELP AND MOTORCYCLES have in common? Would you believe ... a pair of overalls!

This summer, 15 artists were given the most unusual "blank canvas" many of them had ever worked on—a pair of white overalls. The resulting designs were vibrant, powerful, and as varied as the women who will eventually wear them.

THE BIG PICTURE: This is the story of different entities working together to paint a bright and rosy picture for art, business and the future of children's full education. Basically, local company Rosies Workwear collaborated with 15 volunteer artists and SLO's Steyberg Gallery to host a unique art exhibit and online auction of hand-designed overalls. All proceeds will benefit the non-profit, Art in Action, which in turn promotes art education in our schools.

THE FINE DETAILS: Local business owner, Sharon Moore, launched Rosies Workwear for Women ten years ago, in response to the increase of women "do-it-yourselfers." The name Rosies was chosen to



Deanna Graziano with "Chakra Wisdoms."



"Sisterhood of Traveling Overalls" with final product. Keiko Ishikawa, Dominique Luong, Sally Lamas, Deanna Graziano

reflect the "can do" attitude of WWII's working women, represented by the iconic image of Rosie the Riveter. Rosies Workwear is designed and run by women for women. Their unique overalls and coveralls are soft, comfortable and stylish, yet durable enough for the toughest jobs. "Rosies is for women who are strong, passionate, and who really know how to take matters into their own hands to get the job done," Moore said. Rosies customers are a lively bunch of gardeners, homesteaders, home improvement fans, painters, auto mechanics, construction and metal fabricators, housecleaners and animal lovers.

When several customers asked for overalls in colors Rosies didn't carry, Moore began stocking white ones that could be dyed a desired color. "I started thinking how fun it would be to invite artists to paint or decorate the overalls, then auction them off to benefit a non-profit," Moore said. Rosies Workwear has always had a heart to give back to the community. When Moore learned of Art in Action, she liked the non-profit's mission and wanted to contribute.

Art in Action (AIA) has offered visual arts education programs to hundreds of K-8 schools in the U.S. since 1982. Over 230 schools in California have benefitted during a time when funding for art in the curriculum has been cut. Art in Action assists schools to implement a comprehensive, standards-based visual arts program while training teachers and volunteers. Students learn about the great art of the masters, how to look at art and how to create their own unique masterpieces. "I wish I'd grown up being taught (to explore art) and do it for fun, without worrying about the results," said Rosies General Manager, Kate Ashley. "I just started taking art classes and really enjoy learning from other artists." AIA finds that the visual language of art helps students of all learning styles build essential life skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking. Students also benefit from the positive effects of better self-expression, development of creativity, appreciation for art and music, cultural awareness, and enriched personal satisfaction in their achievements.

Last year, Rosies Workwear successfully launched its first fundraising exhibit and auction. They located 12 volunteer artists, potters, and fabric designers to embellish overalls which were then exhibited at the Spirits of Africa gallery. Rosies then hosted an online auction site to sell the wearable art and donated 100% of the proceeds to Art in Action.

This year, SLO artist Sally Lamas learned of Rosies Workwear after winning a pair of overalls at a local Habitat for Humanity worksite. After talking with Moore and Ashley, she grew intrigued by the opportunity to paint on a "wearable canvas." While building her own freelance art and writing business, Lamas constantly beats back the stereotype of "the lonely artist" by collaborating with others. Instead



Opening night at the Steynberg Gallery in SLO



Kaiko Ishikawa in process using fabric paints on "Crow Harvest."

of taking on the overall project alone, she gathered a group of 4 artist buddies to meet weekly for several months to design their overalls while enjoying good food and valuable networking. They joked that their little group should be called the "Sisterhood of the Painted Overalls" (after the book of similar title, "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants"). The "Sisterhood" brainstormed together for inspiring images, then got to work. They spread overalls out over kitchen tables, lined the legs with tinfoil, and practiced different techniques of painting and drawing on a flexible canvas. Deanna Graziano, a member of the group, reflected on the experience. "What I appreciated most was enjoying stories and food together, sharing supplies, and supporting each other when we were stuck in our own creative process," she said.

With 15 artists involved in designing this year's overalls, one could expect some lively creativity. Artists used fabric, lace, beads, silver studs, acrylic paint or sharpie pens. Images include: a Spanish-speaking llama, graffiti art, black and white abstracts, colorful chakra symbols, a Pacific kelp forest, flying swallows, ravens harvesting seeds from sunflowers, and of course, the iconic Rosie the Riveter in red bandana.

To give locals the opportunity to see these artful overalls, Peter Steynberg of Steynberg Gallery (1531 Monterey Street in SLO), generously offered to exhibit them throughout the month of January. Rosies will refresh the show with new overalls throughout the month, so it will take several visits to see them all. With a warm beverage or a tasty snack from the gallery coffee bar, a person will spend a pleasant lunch hour perusing the collection.

The public can bid at the online auction from February 1-14 to secure their favorite overalls in a variety of sizes and designs. The auction

provides a meaningful way to raise funds to keep art programs in our schools and offers a unique gift (in time for Valentine's Day) for the strong, creative women in one's life. All of the proceeds will go to Art in Action. Volunteer artists benefit too. After donating up to 40 hours of personal time to create these whimsical overalls, artists gain national exposure through the online auction. The public can connect to artist bios and websites by referring to the "Description" section for each pair. The online auction site can be viewed now at: 32auctions.com/rosiesaia

For more information about Art in Action, see www.artinaction.org. For more information about Rosies Workwear, go to rosiesworkwear.com.

733 Marsh Street, Suite 200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
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Regional Builder Manager
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bmott@opesadvisors.com
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