

**Festivals that
celebrate women**

LIFESTYLES E1



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of Napa Valley**

IJ WEEKEND



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LIFESTYLES



WOMEN AS PROTECTORS: China has a colorful festival that honors Mazu, which means Protectress of the Fishermen.

Photo provided by Paola Gianturco

femalepower



IJ photo/Jeff Vendsel

CHANGING ROLES: Paola Gianturco of Mill Valley transformed herself from a high-powered PR/ad agency executive to a photographer. Her second book, "Celebrating Women," took her around the world as she chronicled festivals that honor women.

IF YOU GO

"Celebrating Women All Over the World," featuring the photography of Paola Gianturco, as well as costumes and artifacts, will be on display at the International Museum of Women's temporary location at One Market, Concourse Lobby, in San Francisco, through Dec. 17. It is open 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. weekdays. Free. Performances and demonstrations are offered, and Gianturco will sign copies of her books at noon Wednesdays. Family Days, with educational programs, activities and performances, are offered 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. this Saturday and Dec. 11. For more information, call 543-4669, or go online at www.imow.org.

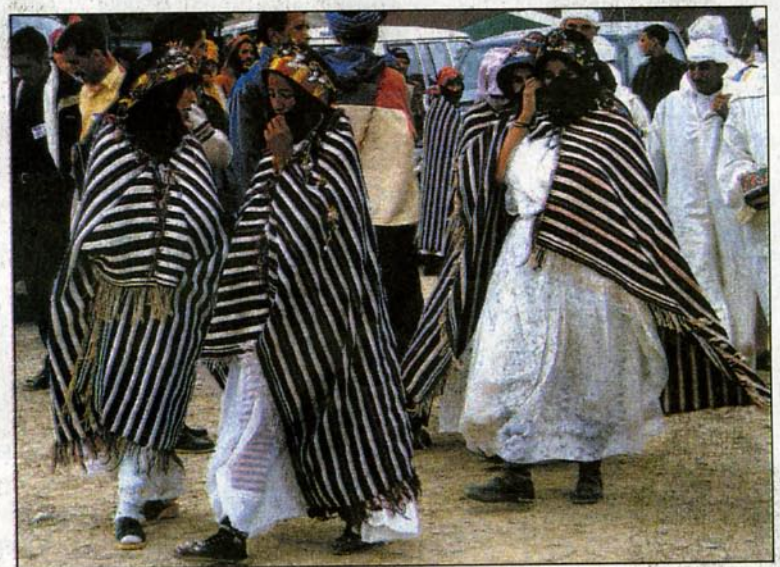


Photo provided by Paola Gianturco

'I DO': Women and divorcees of the Berber tribe in Imichil, Morocco, flirt with the most attractive men and invite them to be their husbands in a marriage festival.

Women

From page E1

Gianturco's changed view on Miss America contestants was her most surprising discovery while she worked on her book, an exhaustive endeavor and logistical nightmare that took her to 15 countries on five continents over five years. There were also years of research and coordination with dozens of international travel companies, guides and interpreters.

Gianturco was astounded by the hundreds of festivals worldwide that celebrate women, and the attributes they are celebrated for: women as healers, nurturers, protectors, providers, flirts, virgins — even warriors.

Recognition of women's violent side surprised her, too.

"Durga and Kali are Hindu goddesses who fight evil. They are vicious and fierce," says Gianturco, adding that they were equipped by the gods with some pretty nasty weapons, too.

Although female soldiers are commonplace nowadays, acting vicious wasn't the kind of behavior nice young girls displayed growing up in 1950s Middle America — as Gianturco did.

As odd as it first seemed to her, Gianturco now embraces that side of women. "It's the idea of women acting in their full capacity, from most nourishing to fiercest, which Indian women see as natural and as defending their children against evil," she says. "It's simply a new way to look at violence ... as appropriate."

That's what Gianturco hopes people get out of her book and the exhibit of her work — that women, and societies, reconsider the definition of "appropriate" behavior.

"Women are limited by their society's expectations," she says. If women could see how behaviors considered inappropriate here are rewarded by other cultures, if they could understand how arbitrary gender assignments are, "it would make it possible to be ourselves," she says.

Gianturco had to learn how to navigate that issue herself. Long before she became a photographer, Gianturco worked in a world of mostly women, at Joseph Magnin ("the first retail group to focus on working women," she notes), and then for 14 years at a Los Angeles advertising firm, the



Photo provided by Paola Gianturco

INDIA: The Nong Krem festival of the Khasi tribe in northeastern India celebrates women as being powerful.

first women-owned ad agency in the country. When she returned to San Francisco in the 1980s, she worked in corporate communications for Saatchi & Saatchi. Back then, she says, "there weren't many senior-executive women. For a long time, I sat in meetings with no other woman present."

That got her thinking.

"I had a perspective on women and gender issues that was unique," she says. And she wanted to do something about it.

So she headed to Stanford University and began studying women and gender issues. Then she threw herself into teaching others about those issues at Stanford and Mills College, founded her own company to consult with large corporations about the glass ceiling, and sat on boards of agencies addressing those issues, including the Association for Women's Rights in Development.

Working in those circles, Gianturco learned of some amazing people. "I was compelled to tell the stories I discovered," she says.

So the transformation from businesswoman to photographer happened almost organically.

"It was not a decision to become an artist but to tell the stories," she says.

"When I was in advertising, marketing, PR, I was always in the business side, managing teams that worked with clients, all in the name of supporting creative people who did the art and the writing," she says.

Interested in photography

since she was 8 years old, and often the official family shooter, Gianturco says, "I just was very eager to do some of that myself."

And she admits she was also "naïve enough to think that was enough," totally bypassing the usual protocols that aspiring photographers follow. "I just thought, 'I can do that.'"

Energized, Gianturco created her first book, "In Her Hands: Craftswomen Changing the World," a collaborative effort with former co-worker and part-time San Franciscan Toby Tuttle that documented 90 female artisans in countries all over the world who sold their crafts to dress, feed and educate their children.

"When I first heard ... low-income women were educating their children with their handicrafts, I thought they were heroic," says Gianturco, the mother of one and stepmother of two.

She got the idea for "Celebrating Women" while talking to the artisans, who enticed her to come back to their countries to take part in their festivals. Although many of the festivals she heard of had a religious basis, many did not. Gianturco says she was amazed that, in a world where women are often not valued, there are hundreds of celebrations that honor them.

Although Gianturco isn't an official of the International Museum of Women, she is one of its biggest supporters. She got involved with the museum in 2000, when she met Elizabeth Colton, the museum's founder and chair,

at an exhibit that IMOW had at the United Nations entitled "Progress of the World's Women."

"Many people had told me I needed to meet Paola," says Colton. "When we finally met, we realized we were both very much about empowering women and showing the value of women."

The museum gave Gianturco a grant, and as she traveled, she picked up masks, jewelry, costumes and artifacts for the museum, which will have a permanent home at Pier 26 in San Francisco. It is scheduled to break ground in 2006 and open in 2008.

"I just feel so passionately that they should have their own home," she says.

Colton appreciates Gianturco's passion — and her beliefs. "She is warm and genuine. She's professional, and always follows through on what she says," says Colton.

"She's amazingly generous in giving over a part of her life to the people and causes she believes in. She's a great delight to have in my life."

In the midst of promoting "Celebrating Women," Gianturco isn't sure what project she'll take on next. But she knows, come early January, she'll be celebrating the arrival of a very special "woman."

"I can't wait to be a grandmother," she says.

"I have high hopes for this little girl."

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