

crafts

Arts

Mieneke Mees:

Weaving her Way from Java to Cap

by Elizabeth Rains

Several decades ago a three-year-old Dutch girl found herself on a sidewalk on the island of Java where some Javanese women were weaving colorful patterns on backstrap looms. Each woman attached herself to a loom by a band laced around her back, using the band to control the tension of the warp. As the women's swift fingers guided their weaving sticks, the little girl stared in awe. Her mother snapped a picture of the scene.

The little girl was Mieneke Mees, who has been instrumental in establishing the Textile Arts program at Capilano College. The scene in Java disappeared from Mieneke's memory until long after she established herself as a crafts-person. Then her mother showed her the photo.

"She said to me, 'Maybe watching those women is what got you interested in weaving,'" Mieneke recalls. "You probably already absorbed a lot about it at a young age."

Mieneke has come a long way in the world of textiles since she was a child in Java, but she says traditional weaving methods still affect her style. She lived in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) from age one to 19. She remembers seeing street merchants always carrying "little shops in buckets" attached by a pole to their shoulders. "They always had textiles for sale. My mother bought many textiles which really were

museum pieces ... silks from India which she bought for very little money. The weavers used highly developed techniques on their primitive backstrap looms. I loved the colors."

After she immigrated to Canada in 1954, Mieneke's interest in weaving resurfaced. During the '60s when "everybody was trying out spinning and weaving and dyeing," she sat in a friend's living room and played with a small inkle loom. She marvelled at the wonderful colors and textures it could create.

She took weaving classes and soon she was hooked. But unlike many artisans of the day, Mieneke pursued her craft beyond mere dabbling. She immersed herself in weaving, dyeing, spinning and textile design to the point of developing a solid career and a newsworthy presence in the craft world.

She began working at the Handcraft House, which was on Esplanade Avenue in North Vancouver. She started as a student, but went on to become a teacher. While she was there, she joined Capilano College in 1974 as a part-time instructor at Welch Street, one of the college's early campuses. Later she began a course in weaving at the Squamish campus, and moved to Capilano College's main campus at Lynnmuir in 1978. In 1981 she became coordinator of the Clay and Textile Arts program.

This August, Mieneke is retiring from her career at the college. "I feel I'm leaving on a high note," she says. "A new Textile Arts two-year diploma program is just beginning. I'm confident it's going to be a very exciting program."

The program, the only one of its kind in Western Canada, will be more focussed than the former Clay and Textile Arts program, in which textile instruction was augmented by pottery classes.

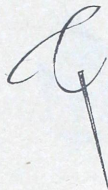
Besides her work at the college, Mieneke has given workshops throughout the province. She was instrumental in establishing the Sunshine Coast Weavers and Spinners Guild, has been on the board of the Circle Crafts Cooperative, and has exhibited locally and in Seattle.

She's been so busy lately that she's had virtually no time to spend on her artistry. Besides taking a trip to Holland, and doing some kayaking and hiking, re-tirement will give her a chance to get back to the craft she loves. At her home in West Vancouver, a five-foot-high, 16-harness Dobby loom stands waiting.

Weaving, although it requires extreme concentration, is like meditation, she says. "I feel I'm part of something that's been going on since the beginning of humankind, when early humans adopted clothing. I feel very connected."

The Textile Arts diploma program will be interviewing applicants in August. Courses in Clay will now be offered through the Capilano College Studio Art program. For information, call 984-4911.

When she isn't working in the Public Relations Dept. at Capilano College, Elizabeth Rains writes freelance articles. She's also worked as a jewelry designer, graphic artist and stage set painter off-Broadway.



Textile student Cindy Schreyer pins orchard on Mieneke Mees during Mieneke's retirement party at Capilano College on April 25

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Arts

Volcano Fest Erupts in August

by Saffron Graham

In early August, Youth Art Works will be presenting its 3rd Annual Under the Volcano Festival. If you thought last year's festival was big, check out this year's event. It promises to be even bigger and better, what with its new socially-conscious focus.

The lineup of 10 local bands will feature equal representation from male and female performers alike. In addition, there will be myriad multicultural presentations, such as Japanese and African drumming, traditional and contemporary jazz groups, and a number of First Nations' performers. All will be live on-site, and performers will be invited to jam together between sets.

And if that's not enough, there will also be workshops on tie-dyeing and how to make your own musical instruments. Don't forget to look out for the giant, larger-than-life puppets circulating the grounds!

This amazing event will take place at Cates Park in North Vancouver, on August 9th,

from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm. If you have any questions or programming suggestions, call us at 988-ARTS. Otherwise, we'll see you on August 9th!

Saffron is the summer program co-ordinator for the Youth Art Works Society. In her spare time, she makes and installs directional signs in hospitals, hotels and office buildings. She also holds degrees in Fine Arts and Education.

Summer Culture Camps

by Michael Ouchi

Summertime means excitement for arts programs at the North Vancouver Recreation Commission. Whatever your child's heart desires can be found at local Rec Centres.

At Camp Delbrook, children between the ages of 6 and 12 will have the opportunity not only to learn about but also experience first-hand the language, food, visual and performing arts, festivals and holidays of Australia, Iran, Japan and six other cultures. They will learn how to play the "djereedoss," an Australian aboriginal

musical instrument, and will be introduced to aspects of West Coast Native culture, such as the powwow, the potlatch ceremony and totem poles. At these World Adventure Camps, your child travel the world without ever having to set foot off the North Shore.

The other summer daycamps at the Recreation Commission will also have an increased emphasis on arts and crafts. Programs include Cartooning/Plasticine and Animation, How to Use your Camcorder, Pottery, Drawing and Watercolours, Ballroom Dancing, Jive, Ballet and Jazz. Daycamps focussing strictly on the arts can be found at recCentre Andrews and recCentre Memorial. Art Explorations, Art Camp Extra and Cézanne's Art Camp are at the Youth Centre. These camps explore many forms of drawing, painting and scratch boards, and cover the basics of art history. The Multi-Media Art Week at recCentre Memorial involves drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking and much more.

All of these exciting arts programs are listed in the North Vancouver Recreation Commission's Summer '92 Leisure Guide. Program registration begins June 1st. Phone 987-PLAY to register.

Michael Ouchi is the programmer at recCentre Delbrook. His specialty is arts programming, so if you have any suggestions or contacts, call him at 983-6326. He has a background in the performing arts, having worked with street performers and Japanese drummers.