

Pioneering Businesswoman Succeeds With 'Batik' Art Form



Reva Schwartz

Judaic Artist, painting on silk.

A pioneering spirit comes naturally to Reva Schwartz. Entrepreneur, artist, mother and grandmother, her life is a legacy of hard work, challenges, and passion for excellence. This vibrant woman has many firsts to her credit. Not the least of which is Weight Watchers, the successful business which she founded in Las Vegas 21 years ago and still directs today.

Taking off 37 pounds was a challenge in 1966 and she still maintains that weight loss. "I apply some of the 'how-to' I taught my members...choose something you enjoy doing and get so involved that eating will not be on your mind."

"I operated Weight Watchers for the first six months on crutches," laughs Reva. "I went skiing and broke my hip. I gave it one month to heal and then opened this pioneering weight control business, a new concept and the first in the West. I was lecturer, clerk, weigher and at the same time, raised my four children," she says triumphantly.

A growing business was not enough for this attractive whirlwind of a woman as she loaned her communication skills to local groups. A past president of Hadassah, she edited the Hadassah Herald and served as columnist for several local papers including the LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE, Henderson Home News, the Jewish Chronicle and several publications back East. She won awards on both coasts and added



This silk "Chupah," or wedding canopy is used as a wall-hanging after the wedding and becomes an heirloom to be handed down through the generations, created by Reva Schwartz.

writing to her list of skills, right behind 'keen business sense.' The writing awards were a predictor of the future. Reva was to receive more awards for skills she didn't even know she had yet.

She found herself at the end of any tension-filled day, creating some new project. Her colorful work, unique and delightfully original, gives Reva her "balance," as she puts it.

"There's no such thing as 'can't,'" says Reva, reflecting on her motivation to take on so many demanding tasks. Her curious mind and "I can do it" attitude found her exploring new avenues of interest such as stained glass, rug designing, wood sculptures, tile tables and more. This robust attitude has revealed itself in Reva's most recent award-winning pioneering effort; art.

Just three years ago, this formerly untrained artist began her instruction in art at the encouragement of her friend, Rita Moses, a Las Vegas artist. She joined art classes taught by Joyce Straus where the complicated Indonesian art form of "batik" was taught. As with almost everything she had undertaken in the past, Reva caught on fast. In fact, awards were just around the corner, as she entered the competition for the American Mothers Association in 1986.

"When I learned that there was no limit to how many pieces you could enter in the competition, I thought this would be a good opportunity to see if what I had done had value. This took courage. My heart was on the line. I knew my pieces would be judged by accomplished artists. I was hoping for just one ribbon or something. They accepted 8 out of the 9 works I submitted and I received three awards!" The complex "batik" art form which she uses takes patience and many processes to create. "You paint on fabric with melted wax, then put in into a dye bath and paint over it again to form the pattern," she says. Reva says she's almost been moved out of her house by the space required to produce the colorful art

pieces.

The pioneering spirit reflected in Reva's art is a trait she has recognized in herself for many years. "I like to do things that I've never tried before. Last year I went parasailing! Starting to paint was a challenge because I really didn't think I could do it. What turned me on was the promise that I would see results within a few hours. I'm an impatient person."

Impatience is a positive characteristic in one so talented as Reva Schwartz. Her love of art and the Jewish culture have become intertwined in her current passion of painting Judaica. "There are not many artists who paint Judaica. For me, that's what I get high on. I was asked to create a wedding canopy for my friend's son in Milwaukee. It is an ageless tradition for Jewish wedding ceremonies to be conducted under the Chupah. The Lavendar Cupah that she created in Batik and silver embroidery was artfully personalized with the date, place and names of the bride and groom, took an award in the American Mothers competition in 1988. "It's not like a wedding gown that you wear once and pack away in a box," says Reva. Her Chupah becomes a treasured heirloom and a very special wall hanging. "It's the kind of thing you pass on to your children. Each Chupah also bears a line from the "Song of Songs" with the inscription "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

"I'm a late bloomer," she says. "Just two years ago my grandson Shoni was turning 13 and I made him a "Tallit" or prayer shawl for his Bar Mitzvah. I realized I had created my first heirloom because he will use it for the rest of his life. I was so inspired. Every time I laid my brush on the fabric, I felt so much love in my heart. There's an aura around it." Reva's incredible ability to produce is something which was taught by example. "I never saw my mother with her hands free, and I am the same way." The wonder of a dynamo like Reva Schwartz has not escaped the attention of all who come to know her. "She's very creative and loves to help people," says long-time friend Susan DeLuca. She's a wonderful Jewish woman, a real humanitarian, who is also affirming of other faiths. She's a warm, gutsy, courageous woman, family oriented and caring; a spritely sort of "tinker bell" she doesn't fit into her age group," concludes the friend who admires this sensitive woman with a "child-like way of looking at the world."

Never one to let lack of materials get in her way, Reva says she's always used scraps in her art. I do my best with materials that are ready to be thrown out. One of her first paintings was from a box of pastels that had fallen on the floor and broken. "I thought, before I throw them out, what can I do with these little pieces?" It became a first experience with abstract art. One of the art pieces which won an award was created simply because "I had some plywood and two pieces of broken mirror," explains this resourceful artist.

It's no surprise that Reva continues to create and has used her successful experiences in art to create another vibrant art form: silk scarves. "I took a trip to the Far East in November. I visited Malaysia and Indonesia and the batik factories where it all started," she said. There she learned more about the silk scarves that she plans to market in Las Vegas and beyond.

A short visit with Reva entitles the guest to a rich display of the scarves, breathtaking in their colorful beauty and expressive in their show of the artist's ability with paint. Her custom designed works are already being enjoyed in eleven states. "There are many things I would like to do, but I just haven't had time. Yet."

Reva's first art show, so warmly received, opened March 6th at the Las Vegas Art Museum, 3332 West Washington in the Nevada Gallery, and continues until March 27th. Museum hours are 10-3 every day but Monday. Give yourself a treat. Go.

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