



Crazy for kimchi

Invasion of the Terracotta Army

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Handbag mogul Gina Alexander

Solace perfected



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Success is in the bag

What would Gina Alexander have done if her handbag designs had failed, her business flopped? What would have happened to young Katie? Alexander responds quickly, instinctively, "I would have run another business."

Alexander is the woman who turned a small kiosk in a Hollywood mall into a \$1.2 million company its second year, and she doubled that in 2009. She now has the resources to maintain a charitable foundation that aids neglected and abused children in the Philippines, which is where her family is from. Last year, success

coach and entrepreneur Dani Johnson selected 30 people to mentor from thousands of applicants. Alexander made the list.

Alexander's doing it with photo-personalized purses, priced from about \$65 into the hundreds. Her proprietary process perfectly reproduces each customer's picture on a silk purse exterior, then customizes the bag's details from handles to lining.

Customers include Elizabeth Taylor, Queen Latifah, Faith Hill and Kobe Bryant. She sells directly through the www.ginaalexander.com Web site and high-end retailers.



What's almost astonishing when you first meet Alexander is that she is just plain nice, and she credits her success to help from other people, including Johnson and husband-partner Richard.

It began when Alexander needed money to adopt a child after several miscarriages. A corporate merger forced her out of her job with a major purse company, so every day she worked the 4 a.m. shift at Starbucks before heading for a full day of selling her purses at the mall. When someone told her she needed to learn how to sell through the Internet, she cried, wondering how she could do that.

Now 8-year-old adopted daughter Katie accompanies her mother at trade shows and meetings, and Makena, her 19-month-old daughter, is often beside her at the office. Alexander admits, "A lot of friends in the same business (still) say it's crazy to make personal handbags. But every day is different. I just love it."



Formerly unknown handbag mogul Gina Alexander is now a supplier to the stars.

Sweet serendipity

These days, it seems everybody concocts truffles. You can get 'em from chocolatiers — some with names you recognize and others you don't — all over the world. But there probably aren't many gurus of ganache that christen their elegant drops with street-sounding names like "Getting Hot in Hia," "Give It to Me Guava" and "Notorious H.O.G." Sôcôla Chocolatier does.

Founded in Oakland in 2001, Sôcôla is named after the Vietnamese word for chocolate. Sisters Wendy and Susan Lieu infuse their confections with worldly favors such as Vietnamese coffee, green tea, Guinness stout and raspberry liqueur. The Vietnamese-American siblings and their high-end, artisan company have garnered attention from their peers in the chocolate industry.

At last year's San Francisco International Chocolate Salon, the largest chocolate show on the West Coast, Sôcôla was among the first-place winners in the best gift set category and second place winners in the best presentation and packaging category. And it's received plenty of good press from various outlets.

So a company with a nine-year history and lots of



positive buzz is

surely the product of a carefully crafted entrepreneurial plan, right? Nope. Sôcôla owes its existence to Wendy Lieu's innocent foray into truffle making. The University of Southern California at Davis economics (and pastry-school) grad simply wanted to try a recipe she found in a gourmet foods publication.

Well, Wendy's friends and family loved her concoction and soon she and Susan (a Harvard grad who set about promoting Sôcôla) were in the chocolate-making business. It started out at home, then moved to a kitchen in a friend's restaurant and eventually into its own commercial setting.

Currently, chocoholics can find Sôcôla's handmade truffles online at www.socolachocolates.com, and in various stores including Whole Foods in San Francisco and Oakland. How sweet is that?



"Bright Red Helmet," "Stainless Steel Helmet with Kettle" and Green Peacock Helmet" by Adeela Suleman.

The bazaar world of Adeela Suleman

On any given day in the bustling city of Karachi, Pakistan, you'll find Adeela Suleman slipping away from her job as a university lecturer to meander the streets and contemplate the endless possibilities of gadgets, dishes and utensils found in the city's street bazaars. It's a longtime habit that she takes wherever she goes, whether that be Chinatown, San Francisco or Milan, Italy. In Suleman's hands, what might have been sold to separate the pasta from the pot could easily wind up in a boutique art gallery or the collection of a connoisseur, transformed into something completely unexpected.

Suleman is driven by pure curiosity and imagination. "Found objects fascinate and motivate me," she confesses. "I'm looking at how I can change their meaning, their form and put them into a new context."

Elisabetta Ponzetti, curator of the first international art exhibition dedicated to steel, found out what it's like to be on the streets with Suleman. Ponzetti writes, "Zig zagging among the market stalls, amid multicolored piles of vegetables and the tempting smells of roasted chicken, Adeela made her way through the noisy chatter of the crowd to find a stall selling kitchen utensils, bathroom fittings and furnishings. With the same rapture as a child delving into glass jars full of temptingly multicolored sweets, Adeela began rummaging through boxes, wrappings and bags, unearthing, studying and weighing things up with the well-trained eye of an expert. What might look like an

ordinary curved spoon to you or I was probably already part of Adeela's next work of art, conceptually removed from its customary value and role."

Try researching Suleman in preparation for a trans-Pacific interview and one can't help but notice that there is more to the story than just quirky sculpture, that there is some affinity between Suleman and her art that drives her to wear it on her head. Of course this is the mark of a great artist, to twist the twist.

Suleman's helmets, three of which are pictured above, are part of an installation called "Salma Sitara and Sisters Motorcycle Workshop." Still made of kitchen gadgets, these artworks reflect an intense scrutiny of the nationality, class and gender issues manifested in Karachi's primary mode of transportation for the city's lower

class — a.k.a. the motorcycle. Suleman explains, "In my country, women sit side-saddle while their husbands drive, both helping to balance themselves, and the children, who might be more than two." On the motorcycle. In the city. More than two. "This live theater provides an insight into gender

relations, class relations and the uniqueness of the Pakistani context," she adds.

The helmets are made from colanders, cutlery, funnels, pans, teapots, spoons, drains, dare we say the kitchen sink, all of which are transformed from objects of labor to objects of beauty.

Suleman's stainless steel art is on exhibit in a number of galleries in the United States and worldwide.



"Untitled" by Adeela Suleman.

"Untitled" by Adeela Suleman.





"Early Winter Eve" by Norman Cooper.

Solace perfected

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month is a celebration of community festivals and educational activities that pay tribute to generations of Asian Pacific Islanders who have enriched America's history. All three artists spotlighted in this issue of *Unity* reveal personal interpretations from Eastern and Western cultural influences. They express appreciation of the cultural differences that inspire them and reveal how those differences are shared through their work.

Norman Cooper

Norman Cooper of Rye, N.Y., cannot recall a time when he was not painting or drawing. After studying at Art Students League in New York, however, raising a family became his

"Ancient Village" by Norman Cooper.



priority. But once Cooper neared retirement, his ability to pursue his passion for art resurfaced.

Cooper says that each time he visited China, he was captivated by its culture. His piece, "Ancient Village," is "a tribute to the still existing, picturesque Chinese villages" that are centuries old. Cooper hopes that even as a new era sweeps across China, this painting will keep these traditional villages in the forefront of our minds. The charm of Chinese water villages is portrayed in Cooper's "Early Winter Eve." The lightly fallen snow provides paradoxical warmth. Muted shades of pastel blues and reflections of a soothing moon depict a montage of Cooper's sketches, photos and recollections.

Long impressed by the ancient principles of Chinese art, Cooper says he will continue to be a student of China's "fascinating culture." His work has been exhibited at the China Institute and the White House.

Yumi Yokoyama

Born in Nagoya, Japan, Yumi Yokoyama arrived in the United States in 1998. Her paint medium of choice was determined at an early age. "I tried different materials such as acrylic and watercolor," she says. "I like oil painting better for two reasons. One is the color, and another is that oil painting is easy to paint over." Perhaps that is why, when asked when she decides that a work is completed, Yokoyama's answer is, "Never." She insists there might be more surprises ahead. A wonderful indication of that decision is reflected in her work,



"Spiral Staircase" and "Peace Lilly" by Yumi Yokoyama.

"Peace Lilly." Yokoyama says, "Initially I painted just a peace lily. A couple of years later, I painted a woman over it." As the viewer beholds the emerging woman in her colored splendor, a paint-over is never apparent.

Yokoyama's "Spiral Staircase" exudes the ambience of solace. The soft but bright colors agree with the smooth drape of the woman's dress. "Sometimes a staircase looks like life," Yokoyama says. "It could be up or down." The woman's pensive look confirms her assertion.

Sachiko Furui

Sachiko Furui is a native of Japan and was an adult when she moved to the United States. Furui recalls her father buying her first oil painting set when she was 3 years old and her first painted image was that of a sunset she observed from her mother's arms.

Subtle cultural images provide strength in *Unity's* cover piece, "Mystic, CT 100 Views of America." Made in the early years of her life, Furui used a woodblock print, a traditional Japanese printing method. "Matsuyama Shrine" is Furui's interpretation of the shrine near her home in Japan. Throughout her childhood, she visited the shrine to watch seasonal festivals, ceremonies honoring newborns and neighbors' weddings.

The balance of delicate handmade Japanese paper and an intricate floral arrangement reveals itself in Furui's artwork titled "Flower Party." Furui reveals that each "flower has their own story to tell based on their beauty and fragrance."

Furui is currently working on a project titled "100 Views of America." Even though she has lived in Japan longer than in the United States, Furui says, "All my imagination and creation are mixed images from both countries." Those images speak to her deep appreciation of the beauty of America's landscape and her lifelong project intertwining that beauty with Japanese traditions.

"Matsuyama Shrine" and "Flower Party" by Sachiko Furui.





Stadium and performers during the opening ceremonies of the Nadaam National Games in Ulan Bator, Mongolia. As in the United States, advertising banners tout shopping online.

Good eats in Mongolia

For the vast majority of Americans, Mongolia is a mystic world of mountains, fu manchus, funny hats and horses, mostly because that is the image portrayed in cinematography and other Western media. Visions of the great Genghis Kahn blazing the Asian countryside with sword-wielding posse in tow don't necessarily put modern Mongolia into proper perspective.

Mountainous, remote and largely noncommercialized, the immense, panoramic and natural beauty of Mongolia is very much breathtaking. Among the people living in this landlocked country are strong cultural affinities to livestock and the nomadic lifestyle. A large percentage of Mongolians live in large tents, or yurts, and tend to a variety of animals, but Genghis Kahn died centuries ago, and with him died much of the stereotype we associate with Mongolia today.

Mongolia came under Chinese rule in the late 1600s, but in 1921, the country won its independence with help from the Soviet Union. Chinese, Russians, immigrants and world travelers have all brought a myriad of new ideas and lifestyles to the country, especially in urban areas such as Ulan Bator, the capital city.

Diversity aside, vegans and vegetarians probably have several more centuries to wait before Mongolian cuisine caters to their appetites. Meat, cheese and other animal products are the bulk of ingredients served at chow time. In fact, the five pillars of Mongolian cuisine are sheep, goats, horses, camels and cattle. Mongolians make dairy products from each — airag, or fermented mare's milk, being an example. These high-protein, high-fat dishes satisfy dietary needs that could never be satisfied with tofu and quinoa. The long, harsh winters and highly active lifestyles require Mongolians to fluff up in order to stay warm and have expendable calories on reserve.



While many Mongolian recipes are too ethnic for the masses, several are working their way into the mainstream American gastronomy. Mongolian beef (left) is a favorite served in Chinese restaurants. It is filling and perfect for laying in extra spice. Try the recipe included here and see for yourself.

Mongolian beef

1 pound sirloin or flank steak

Marinade:

1 egg white

Pinch of salt

1 teaspoon sesame oil

1 tablespoon cornstarch

Vegetables:

4 green onions, sliced on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces

1 8-ounce can baby corn

1 garlic clove, minced

Sauce:

3 tablespoons hoisin sauce

2 tablespoons water

1 tablespoon dark soy sauce

2 teaspoons rice vinegar

1/4 teaspoon chile paste or to taste

Other:

1 teaspoon sugar

1 cup oil for frying beef

2 tablespoons oil for stir-frying

Slice the beef across the grain into thin strips. Add the marinade ingredients in the order given and marinate the beef for 30 minutes. To prepare the vegetables, wash the green onions and slice on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces. Peel and mince the garlic. Rinse the can of baby corn with warm running water. Drain thoroughly. Mix together the sauce ingredients and set aside.

When the beef has finished marinating, heat the wok and add 1 cup oil. When oil is ready, add the beef and fry until it changes color. Remove the beef from the wok and drain on paper towels.

Clean out the wok with a paper towel, and add 2 tablespoons of oil for stir-frying. When the oil is ready, add the garlic. Stir-fry briefly, and add the baby corn. Add the green onions.

Make a well in the middle of the wok by pushing the vegetables up to the side. Add the sauce and bring to a boil, stirring to thicken.

Stir in the sugar. Add the beef and combine with the sauce and vegetables. Serve hot. Serves 4.

Mongolian Beef with Vegetables recipe by Rhonda Parkinson at About.com.

Crazy for kimchi

Pssst ... When's the last time you actually ate the recommended five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day? Do you even remember veggies ... you know, those things your mother said you had to eat if you wanted to enjoy dessert, play outside, grow up to be big and strong? Well, if your hankering for leafy greens doesn't rival your passion for bloomin' onions or cheese fries, go ahead and blame your mom for depriving you of the pleasures of kimchi.

In Korea, kimchi, or fermented vegetables, is revered. Seoul has a kimchi museum, and throughout Korea, you will find special refrigerators designed to maintain the ideal temperature for the malodorous vegetables. And the traditional-foods division of the Korea Food Research Institute's mission focuses on the "scientific research of Korean fermented foods ... for their globalization." As you might suspect, there's even a festival held each October in Gwangju that includes a contest to determine — what else — the best kimchi.

Cecilia Hae-Jin Lee, who penned "Quick and Easy Korean Cooking," says the first record of kimchi dates to the seventh century. The subject of many a proverb, ("If you have kimchi and rice, you have a meal" is probably the most famous one) kimchi was likely

consumed much earlier than the seventh century. Modern versions surfaced about eight centuries later.

Fast-forward to today and the once-lowly kimchi just might evolve into the global sensation the Korean government has worked so hard to cultivate. In America, kimchi is luring fans in high places. "I made my first batch of kimchi the first week of October," wrote Jane Black recently in the Washington Post. "Since then, there has been only a single 13-day period when I haven't had some in the fridge. Thirteen very long days."

Connie Choe-Harikul and her mother empathize with kimchi's legion of admirers. Through their business, Granny Choe's Kimchi Co., and Web site, www.grannychoe.com, they sell homemade kimchi and deliver it across the United States. Choe-Harikul admits she hasn't always relished the piquant and pungent dish. As a child, she refused to eat it. "In a class of 450 kids in my high school, I was the only Korean student," Choe-Harikul told *Audrey* magazine last fall. "Now it's sort of cool to be more diverse and in touch with your heritage. But it was less cool when I was growing up."

Oghee "Granny" Choe's kimchi is handmade and unlike its mass-produced counterparts, contains no preservatives or MSG. Choe says fresh versions like hers are full of vitamins and good bacteria, among other things. Whether you buy kimchi from a specialty purveyor or a mass retailer, take heart: Your mother would probably approve.



Granny Choe's Kimchi Co. co-founders Connie Choe-Harikul, left, and Oghee Choe, along with Baby E

Granny Choe's Kimchi Stew

- 16 ounces thinly sliced pork belly (can substitute uncooked bacon)
- 2 tablespoons kochujang (Korean chili paste)
- 3 cups water
- 1 cup kimchi
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon kochukaru (Korean pepper powder)
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 2 green onions (chopped)
- 2 kochu (hot green chili pepper), chopped
- ½ pack of tofu, cut into cubes
- Salt and black pepper

Heat a medium-sized pot on the stove, then add pork. Sauté for about 1 minute. Add kochujang and continue cooking until pork turns white. Add water and kimchi.

Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Add soy sauce, kochukaru and garlic. Simmer for 20-30 minutes, then turn off heat. Add chilies, green onions and tofu.

Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve with rice.

Granny Choe's Kimchi Stew. Photo by Patrick Bae.





Part of the mystique of the Terracotta Soldiers is the illusion of portraiture, that each soldier is a replica of a specific individual.

China's first emperor comes to life

Doing a little yard work can always be fraught with unexpected adventures, but one rarely expects to find the eighth wonder of the ancient world while digging around in the backyard. But it has happened.

In 1974, while Americans were consumed with the peculiarity of a sitting United States president resigning his day job, much hubbub was also being made in a northwest province of China over a few clay figurines turned up by thirsty peasants digging for water. Sure, it might have been odd that these figurines were more than 5 feet tall, but more challenging was the meaning of finding more than 8,000 of them, each one seeming to be a portrait of a specific human being who, by the way, lived more than 2,000 years ago.

It's worth mentioning today — nearly 40 years since the initial discovery — because a special traveling exhibition of the finest specimens from the archeological site just completed a tour of the United States. With its departure, a deeper understanding of world civilization has been left behind. For instance, we know now that standardization and mass-production — pillars of a prosperous modern society — were old hat to Qin Shi Huangdi, the self-proclaimed first emperor of China, who lived from 259 B.C. to 210 B.C.

Little bit of history: Qin Shi Huangdi was one of the first great unifiers of present-day China. He started the first version of the Great Wall and built a road system that would

make the Romans green with envy. He was also a ruthless warrior and is known to have burned books and executed scholars to maintain the administration of his government.

Qin Shi Huangdi understood standardization and utilized its efficiency in the construction of his mammoth projects. While the 8,000 Terracotta Soldiers appear to be portraits of real dead people, in fact, they were constructed with identical

basic forms and individualized in the finishing process.

“Qin Shi Huangdi decreed a mass-production approach,” writes Arthur Lubow for Smithsonian magazine. “Artisans turned out figurines almost like cars on an assembly line. Clay, unlike bronze, lends itself to quick and cheap fabrication. Workers built bodies, then customized them with heads, hats, shoes, mustaches, ears and so on, made in small molds. Some of the figures appear so strikingly

individual they seem modeled on real people, though that is unlikely.”

The site today, just minutes from Xi'an in Shaanxi Province, includes roughly 600 pits, many still unexcavated, that stretch over a 22-square-mile area. Pictured center page is the inside of the Museum of the Terracotta Army, a covered, atmosphere-controlled monstrosity protecting 4 acres of dirt, clay and antiquity. That this discovery is indeed the eighth wonder of the ancient world isn't a debate on par with “who was the best player in the Major Leagues.” Seeing just one of these soldiers will make anyone a believer.

More than 8,000 figures have been unearthed since 1974.

