

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Marsha Gómez, Sculptor, 1951-1998

Of Choctaw and Mexican-American descent, Marsha Gómez sought to explore her heritage through art and to use her art for social change. She was born in New Orleans and attended school in Arkansas, where she learned Native American pottery techniques. After earning a degree in art education, she moved to Austin in 1982¹ and immediately plunged into community service. Convinced that creativity lies within every person, she was a popular artist-in-residence in Austin schools and taught art to seniors in community centers. She co-founded the Indigenous Women's National Network to provide resources and share technical skills. She directed Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change, a 20-acre retreat complete with outdoor stage, meandering creek, herb garden, and sweat lodge.²



Marsha created pottery in the monumental style of women artists from Oaxaca and New Mexico. She is best known for her sculpture “Madre del Mundo,” an indigenous woman gazing contemplatively at a globe cradled in her lap. The work was commissioned for a Mother’s Day peace protest at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. Federal agents confiscated the statue but later returned it, and Marsha placed it atop a knoll at Alma de Mujer. More commissions followed. She produced a second Madre del Mundo for the Peace Farm in the Texas Panhandle, across the road from the Pantex nuclear weapons plant. She made a third for Casa de Colores, an indigenous resource center and cooperative farm in Brownsville.

In 1992 Marsha’s friend Genevieve Vaughn purchased land outside the Nevada Test Site and donated it to the Western Shoshone, who had originally inhabited it. Women gathered on the site to construct a straw-bale temple to Sekhmet, ancient Egyptian lion-headed goddess of birth, fertility, and rage. Marsha created a life-sized Sekhmet statue for the temple as well as a fourth Madre del Mundo.

For many years Marsha struggled to provide adequate services for her son, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic and shuffled between home, psychiatric institutions, and the penal system. At age 24, days after his release from jail, Mekaya murdered his mother.³

Quotations

*The energy and spirit that go into my work result in a unique expression of respect and reverence for women, the Earth, and indigenous way of life.*⁴

*Working with clay as my dear companion for the past fifteen years, I have come closer each year to a deeper union with the Earth and closer to an appreciation of how all the elements in the universe work together. In turn, I myself have become a vessel to the vessels that are created through my heart and hands.*⁵

Photo

Sally Jacques, Austin.

Endnotes

¹ Main sources for this article are Mary Jane Garza, “Eagle Woman,” *Austin Chronicle*, Features 1998, online <http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/vol18/issue06/xtra.gomez.html> (June 2, 2005); Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), pp. 308-309; Marsha Gómez, “Women of the Earth: Art and Activism on Sacred Lands,” originally published in *Women of Power*, issue 23, reprinted in *La Voz de Esperanza*, November 1998, pp. 5-6; “Sekhmet Temple in Nevada,” <http://www.sekhmettemple.com> (August 29, 2005).

² Description of Alma de Mujer Center comes from “Best of Austin 1998—Best Place to Have a Gathering,” *Austin Chronicle*, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/annual/bestof/98/critics.arch.html> (April 22, 2005).

³ Information about Mekaya Gómez is from Kyu-Heong Kim, “Gomez Exhibit Vibrates with Life,” *The Daily Texan*, April 14, 2004, online <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/news/2004/04/14/Entertainment/Gomez.Exhibit.Vibrates.With.Life-659294.shtml> (March 15, 2005); and “Court Ordered Medications and Mekaya’s Story,” *Capacity for Justice Newsletter* 2:4 (September 2003), online http://www.capacityforjustice.org/NewsLetters/Volume%20II/Issue%204/Newsletter_vol_II_Issue_4_Sept_2003.aspx (March 15, 2003).

⁴Marsha Gómez, “Women of the Earth,” p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.