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# STANFORD

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004

A PUBLICATION OF THE STANFORD ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



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ON NOW: Photojournalist Gianturco (center) has documented festivals worldwide.

Poland, Bolivia, Thailand and Brazil.

Shortly after Gianturco began work on *Celebrating Women*, she happened to meet Elizabeth Colton, founder and chair of the fledgling women's museum. It seemed natural to collaborate, Gianturco says. "They were doing exactly what I was doing: promoting multicultural understanding and celebrating the lives of women." The museum's board approved the idea of an exhibition based on Gianturco's book and gave her an acquisition

## Telling Untold Stories

A museum that's all about women. **by Linda Weber**

Don't be surprised if you haven't heard of the International Museum of Women; it is still closer to concept than reality. But that's about to change. After years of planning, the museum has secured a future home: Pier 26, a San Francisco waterfront building that has been designated a historic monument. Renovation of the 150,000-square-foot site is slated to start in 2006 for a 2008 opening. Meanwhile, from a small downtown office housing a staff of six, a \$120 million fundraising campaign is under way.

Being a museum without walls hasn't stopped organizers from holding exhibits, a lecture series—and now its first major show, which runs through December 17 at One Market, a concourse and gallery space near the city's Ferry Building and the revitalized Embarcadero promenade. The exhibition is based on the work of photojournalist Paola Gianturco and shares the name of her new book, *Celebrating Women: Festivals Around the World* (powerhouseBooks, 2004). Over the course of four years, Gianturco, '61, traveled the globe to events that spotlight the varieties of



female achievement, ranging from prowess in the kitchen (the Fête des Cuisinières, French West Indies) to their valor as warriors (Durga Puja and Kali Puja festivals in India).

Gianturco, a communications consultant and lecturer on women and leadership, was drawn to the subject several years ago while writing about women entrepreneurs in Third World countries (*In Her Hands: Craftswomen Changing the World*, Monacelli Press, 2000). "I discovered that in many countries there are festivals that celebrate women's accomplishments, roles, rites of passage and spiritual lives—and those festivals are attended by men and children as well as women," she says. Gianturco documented events in 17 countries as diverse as Swaziland, Austria,



grant to use on her travels. Gianturco gladly broadened the scope of her project and brought back costumes, masks, music and festival jewelry. She is returning the favor by pledging all book royalties to the museum.

"This exhibit is very sense-rich," says



Anne Balsamo, project manager and curator of the show. "There are photographs, artifacts, costumes, music and dance performances, demonstrations of cultural crafts, audio descriptions, stories, and multimedia pieces created specifically for the exhibit." As part of the museum's mission to run dynamic programs, cultural groups from the Bay Area are

PAOLA GIANTURCO

mounting performances and demonstrations during the show's 10-week run, giving ethnic communities a chance to participate.

Museum founder Colton had her first inkling of a facility that would serve as both an archive of women's contributions to the world and as a resource center on women's issues in 1985. She was scouring the Bay Area for a place where her daughter could learn about women's historical achievements, and came up empty-handed. So Colton, a political campaign consultant, started the Women's Heritage Museum in Palo Alto. Without facilities of its own, the museum curated itinerant exhibits, negotiated for display space, placed official plaques honoring California women in historic locations, and collaborated on projects with the Holocaust Center and the National Park Service.

"Women's history from the beginning has been recuperative and remedial," says Karen Offen, a historian affiliated with Stanford's Institute for Research on Women and Gender and an early supporter of the museum. "The Women's Heritage Museum specialized in resuscitating California women's history."

Out of that effort grew aspirations for a world-class facility covering global issues affecting women, and in 1997 Colton's enterprise became the International Museum of Women. One of the

members of the board of directors is William "Britt" Stitt, Jr., MS '64, chair of Power Engineering Contractors.

Offen, MA '64, PhD '71, joined the board in 1999 and has been active in pinpointing themes for future exhibits. "We'll examine what it means to be a woman in a particular culture and how gender identity is shaped. Another key element has to do with spaces and places where women congregate, and we also want to look at the wide gamut of the work women do, from making babies to making art, work being not just something you get paid for," she says.

The museum will have a strong educational component, Offen adds. Plans

include a newsroom—a resource center with materials for teaching women's issues, information about groups working for social change and how to get involved, and an archive of personal stories. Staff also will bring programs to community groups such as boys' and girls' clubs, and host events at the museum to encourage discussion and debate.

There are plans to reach women all over the world through the Internet. "We intend to build the virtual site out so that people can access the online component of exhibits from around the world in five or six languages," Offen says. And the museum hopes to extend its reach by sending exhibits to other venues, as it



did with *Women of the World: A Global Collection of Art*, which went to Athens as part of the 2004 Summer Olympics.

Until its doors open—projections show that it could welcome up to half a million visitors a year once construction is completed—the museum continues to build programming one exhibit at a time. The next one, *Imagining Ourselves: An Anthology of Art and Ideas*, is scheduled for 2005. It will showcase visual art and writing by women under 35 from around the world, who were asked to express what defines their generation. ■

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