

# Masking pain

ARTIST BECKY OLVERA SCHULTZ'S WANTS TO CAPTURE LIFE IN HER NATIVE AMERICAN-INSPIRED MASKS

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON  
LCWCarmel@aol.com

**B**ecky Olvera Schultz always knew she would be an artist. For as long as she could remember, the Southwest native had enjoyed painting and drawing, sewing and other handicrafts, anything that ignited her creative spirit and engaged her skilled hands.

When she wasn't making art at home or at school, she was imagining a formal education in art, followed by a brilliant career. Until she actually went to college.

If she were willing to relegate her art to the sidelines and pursue medicine, her parents would get behind her education.

Theirs was reason enough for Schultz to subjugate her art but, ultimately, not enough impetus to stay in school.

Two decades later, Schultz had reconciled herself to a successful career in advertising sales. She had married, purchased a house and built a meaningful relationship with her parents.

**The exhibit is a study in portraiture, expressed through portrait masks designed to depict not just the structure of the face but the personality that informs it**

She had not formally returned to her art, but she was doing a little beadwork, a little writing and a lot of sales. She was satisfied, feeling good about herself. She was happy.

And then her younger brother died. Her only sibling. Suicide. Between the guilt and the grief, Schultz wondered if it might be easier to go with him than endure her pain.

Of Mexican and Azteca/Kickapoo heritage, Schultz was involved in the promotion of a local Indian Council, through which she spoke with a colleague aware of her grief, who suggested she might benefit from a class in drumming.

"I didn't necessarily connect with the people in the class," said Schultz, "but I did enjoy the drumming. I had this hoop drum



Several of artist Becky Olvera Schultz's masks will go on display at Seaside City Hall as part of a multi-media exhibit "Native Expressions" that also includes the artist's rawhide shields, gictees and serigraphs.

in wood with elk hide stretched and laced over the hoop. The feel of it under my hands was soothing, satisfying. I had been so far removed from the tactile nature of things. It reminded me that I needed to go back to working with my hands, to express myself artistically."

Witness the return of Schultz's creative voice at "Native Expressions," a show of her latest works in the presentation gallery at Seaside City Hall.

The exhibit is a study in portraiture, expressed through portrait masks designed to depict not just the structure of the face but the personality that informs it.

"Unlike most masks, which don't have eyes," said Schultz, "these portraits are quite lifelike. Their eyes are part of the sculpture. They look like real people, emote like real people."

Schultz's work began with a real person, through an old photograph of a Native American woman from which she sculpted

## ART OPENING

- **What:** Becky Olvera Schultz's "Native Expressions"
- **Where:** Walter Lee Avery Gallery, Seaside City Hall, Hilby and Canyon Del Rey, Seaside
- **When:** Exhibit opens Monday, June 2; artist's reception, 7-8:30 p.m. Friday, June 13; exhibit runs through June 27
- **Tickets:** Free and open to the public
- **Information:** 688-0694 or [www.native-expressions.com](http://www.native-expressions.com)

during an early class in clay.

"I didn't connect with the teacher," she said, "with the way she worked, what she wanted us to do. But, I loved the clay; it just felt good to get my hands into it. And, I did like what she taught me. She looked at my work and

said, 'I think faces are your thing.' I started with that one face and then studied books on Native Americans to model others. I was seeking not ceremonial and not spiritual but portrait masks. I'm not trying to represent something mystical but to capture life."

Schultz begins her portraiture by studying the nature of her subjects, either inherent or imagined, before forming her masks in low-fire clay and then firing them in her personal kiln.

It is not upon lifting the masks from their oven that she encounters their personality, she says, but once she has personalized each with face paint, feathers, jewelry and horse or bison hair from Montana.

"The clay structure of the mask is a fraction of the personality," said Schultz. "When I'm forming a new face, I get into the structure and form of it, but I really don't know what personality it will take on until I'm fin-

Please see Masking page 25

### Masking

*From page 23*

ished. It's all a process of discovery."

In addition to her masks, Schultz crafts ornate rawhide shields and indigenous dolls. She has explored the two-dimensional elements of photography and serigraph imagery as well and has exhibited her work through-

out the Midwest and Western states, and has participated in both national and international juried competitions.

"I have directed my consuming interest in the native peoples of the Americas into my own personal expression," said Schultz in her artist statement. "I derive immense satisfaction from putting life into the materials I work with. My art is an extension of my spirit, a piece of my personal vision and a constant source of comfort and healing for me." **GO!**