

Native CA. Page



Surviving the Odds



Restoring, Learning,
& Sharing Culture



5 Generations



Accordion
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Religious Practices: Past to Present
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Acorn Soup



Beading



Soaproot



Cordage



Additional Subpages Needed:

- Trina Marine (scrolling quotes)
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Against All Odds

Native Californian Stories of Endurance

Have you ever wondered what happened to the first people of the place now known as Hayward and beyond?

We invite you to join Jalquin/Saclan Ohlone/Bay Miwok elder Ruth Orta and her five-generation, 60+ member extended family as they share details of their tribal, family, and ancestral history. Despite more than two centuries of upheaval, suffering, and change since the colonization of their homelands, against all odds the region's first people continue to bring their cultures forward into the future while living as modern Americans.

Students at Cal State East Bay created the exhibition for The C. E. Smith Museum on the Hayward campus. Students collaborated with Nancy Olsen, a De Anza College professor, and Bev Ortiz, a naturalist and ethnographer for East Bay Regional Parks, consultants who have worked with Ruth Orta's family since the 1980s and 1990s respectively. With backing from CSU, East Bay's A2E2 fund and California Humanities – a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities – the students were able to conduct interviews with the family members and create this exhibit to share what they learned.

[PDF Brochure link](#)



Surviving the Odds ➡



**Restoring, Learning
& Sharing Culture** ➡



5 Generations ➡

Surviving the Odds

"We want you to know that we are still here, honoring our ancestors in this part of the world."
—Ruth Orta Jalquin/Saclan Ohlone/Bay Miwok Elder

THE IMPACTS OF HISTORY BEFORE NON-INDIAN INTRUSION

Local Native peoples knew and understood everything in the natural world, including grizzly bears and wolves, with an intimacy unfathomable to most people today. Their sacred narratives describe how the world and people were created at the dawn of time.

They thrived here for eons because they knew how to balance human needs with that of the land and all of its other inhabitants. They used specialized land management techniques, like burning, that increased habitat diversity and the numbers and health of the plants and animals on which they relied. Their social, political, economic, religious, and material heritage is profound.



FIRST ENCOUNTERS, 1542-1776

The first non-Indians to intrude on the lives of local Native peoples did so by sea in 1542, anchoring in the place now known as Monterey Bay. Several expeditions by sea and land followed, their members traveling well-worn trails made by untold generations of Native people. The Native people they encountered reacted to their arrival in different ways—some with fear and threat; others with curiosity, hospitality, and gifts; still others by treating the arrival of these strangers as a diplomatic event. These early encounters portended a time of tremendous disruption and upheaval to come in the lives of the first peoples of this land.



SPANISH MISSIONIZATION, 1770-1833

The permanent settlement of Spanish priests, soldiers, and later civilians in the region now known as the Bay Area initiated a time of incalculable suffering and change for local Native peoples. The Spanish established missions, presidios (forts), pueblos (towns), and privately-owned, land-grant ranchos (ranches), all built and run with Indian labor. Many Native people resisted missionization. That resistance crumbled in the face of forces beyond their control. These included the loss of countless elders and children due to introduced European diseases. They included corporal punishment and the forced return of runaways. Another factor: The substantial environmental changes that resulted from the introduction of cattle, horses, and invasive plants, and the outlawing of periodic landscape burning.

SECULARIZATION AND MEXICAN RANCHOS, 1834-1846

After Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821, a process was established to privatize (secularize) mission lands and to greatly expand the number of privately-owned ranchos, usually thousands of acres in size. Although the priests had promised to one day return mission lands to local Native peoples, only a tiny number of Ohlones, and no Bay Miwoks, ever received any land. Instead, they became serf-like laborers on non-Indian owned ranchos, the older boys and men working for no pay as *vaqueros* (cattle herders and horsemen); the older girls and women as unpaid house keepers and childcare workers. Corporal punishment was used to keep them under control.



STATEHOOD, 1850-1924

"When one bought a ranch, one bought the Indians that went with it."
--John Walker, 1934, referring to late 1800s East Bay ranch owners

In 1850, when California became a state, Native people became subject to so-called "apprentice acts." These state laws legalized the *de facto* slavery of Indian people throughout California and led to their being bought and sold in non-Indian settlements throughout the state, including the Bay Area. Although outlawed after the Civil War, the practice continued for decades. The United States did not grant citizenship to American Indians until 1924, four years after non-Indian women.



THE ODDS

Until relatively recently, most Native people in the East Bay and beyond lived lives on the social and economic margins of society. They labored as the state's original migrant farm workers. They worked as manual laborers and maids.

Invisible to most non-Indians and discriminated against by others, they had to make many hard choices in order to survive. These included the decision whether or not to hide one's Indian identity and leave behind ancestral traditions and language. They also included the decision by some to share ancestral traditions and languages with non-Indian anthropologists and linguists, so that one day these might be known by the broader world and restored by their descendants.

OVERCOMING THE ODDS

During the mid-19th century, some Native people established village communities (rancherías) that lasted into the early 1900s. In Alameda and Contra Costa Counties these included Alisal (near Pleasanton), El Molino (Niles), Del Mocho (Livermore), and "The Springs" (site of today's Fairmont Hospital, San Leandro).

Village communities such as these enabled Native people to provide greater social, cultural, and economic support to each other. Even when living outside such village communities, Native people kept in contact and did what they could to support each other.

This exhibition tells the story of one five-generation Ohlone, Bay Miwok, and Plains Miwok family's journey to not only survive against all odds, but to thrive.

Restoring, Learning, and Sharing Culture

Four generations of Ruth's extended family have participated since 1994 in sharing family history, stories, and culture past to present at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. Coyote Hills, the site four ancestral Tuibun Ohlone village sites, is operated by the East Bay Regional Park District.

Through collaborative public programming, Ruth's family members have taught the staff at Coyote Hills about family history and tradition. In turn, traditionalist Native elders from varied Central California tribes, and staff trained by these and other Native elders, have taught family members about the creation of culturally-specific objects and foods in old and new contexts.



"I'm proud that my mother, daughter, and grandson participate with me in the programs at Coyote Hills. We've all specialized in specific Ohlone skills: soaproot brush making for myself, acorn making, string making, and games for my mother, daughters and grandsons."

--Ruth's daughter

Ramona

Cordage



Soaproot Brush



Acorn Soup



Beading



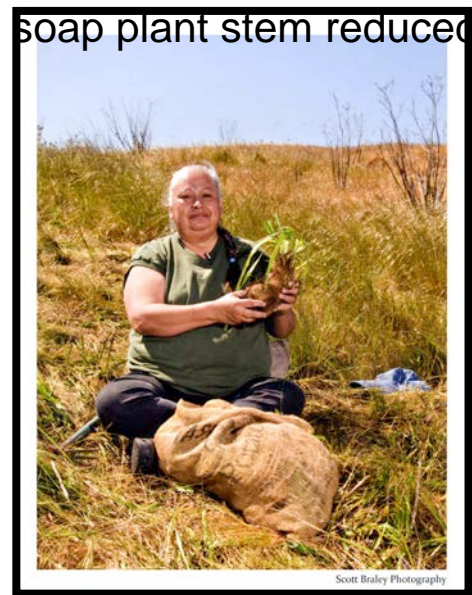
Soaproot Brush Making



Soap, Brushes, Glue and more

In the old days, Ohlones and Miwoks made “soaproot brushes” from the bulbs of soap plant (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*). They used these like miniature whisk brooms to clean baskets and mortar stones.

Ohlones and Miwoks also used the bulbs to make a detergent foam for washing and for a specialized fishing method. For food, they ate the tender, young leaves, and they roasted leaf-wrapped soap plant bulbs in hot coals in an earth-covered “pit oven.” A hair wash from the pounded soap plant stem reduced dandruff.



Ruth's daughter Ramona fell in love with soaproot brush making in 1996, when she first experienced this ancient skill during a series of workshops conducted for ten Ohlones interested in sharing their history and cultures on a part-time basis at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont.

When Ramona completed her first brush, she became the first Jalquin/Saclan Ohlone/Bay Miwok to make one since about 1776, when colonization began to upend the ancestral Jalquin and Saclan worlds. After Ramona mastered all of the processes involved in making soaproot brushes, she began to innovate some unique methods. In so doing, she became the first California Indian to make miniature soaproot brush pins and even tinier soaproot brushes.



Gallery



Cordage →
Beading →
Acorn Soup →

Cordage

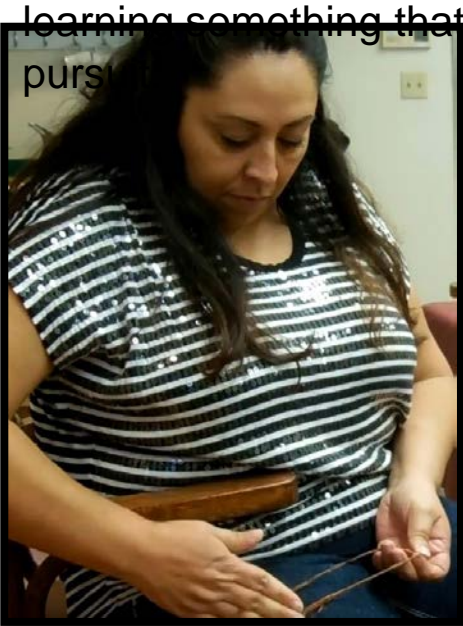
From Plant to String

Ohlones and Miwoks made string, rope, fishing nets, and carrying nets from fibers located on the stems of dogbane, milkweed, and stinging nettle. Ohlones and Miwoks gathered dogbane stalks in the wintertime, after the sap had dropped into the underground stems (rhizomes) and the leaves had fallen off. Before gathering the stems, they said prayers and left offerings of thanks. By annually cutting the stalks, a form of pruning, Ohlones and Miwoks caused the re-growth of new, healthy shoots; removed plant material that would have otherwise rotted or become diseases; and the spread of new rhizomes.



Sabrina, Ruth's eldest grandchild, decided to specialize in dogbane cordage making when she realized that she could somehow make "perfect" string after two or three tries. Sabrina had wanted to learn an ancestral skill at which she could excel in order to both connect with and to honor her ancestors. After exposure to varied old-time skills in 1997, Sabrina knew that dogbane cordage making was the one she had been looking for.

Sabrina learned to gather dogbane and make her cordage with "pleasant thoughts and a positive attitude," an ancestral value that appealed to her. She also relished learning something that had once been a largely male pursuit.

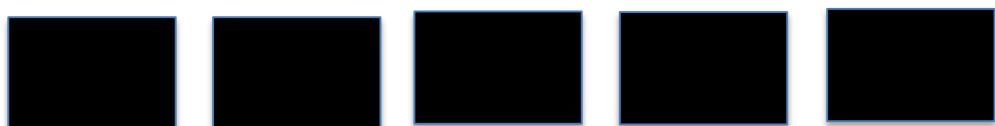


"When I make cordage out of dogbane, it gives me a feeling of peace in my soul and a connection to this beautiful earth and my ancestors."

To secure the future of dogbane cordage making, Sabrina demonstrates this ancient skill at park events and schools. Sabrina's four children have accompanied her since birth to these demonstrations, sparking a lifelong love of and interest in the skill. While Sabrina's boys have recently shown more of an interest in fire making, she hopes that her children will someday take her place as the next generation of Ohlone and Miwok.



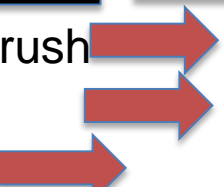
Gallery



Soaproot Brush

Beading

Acorn Soup



Beading

From Nut to Bead

Ohlones and Miwoks enjoyed eating gray pine nuts, despite their relatively small size and thick, hard shells. Ohlones chewed gray pine pitch to treat rheumatism.

Today's Ohlones and Miwoks use the thick-shelled gray pine nuts to create beads, just like their ancestors. They use these beads as elements of ceremonial regalia, often in combination with whole olivella shell beads, clam shell disk beads, and abalone pendants.

In recent years, members of Ruth's family have begun to make pine nut beads for use on necklaces. These serve as visible symbols of cultural identity and pride.



Making Pine Nut Beads

To make pine nut beads, first harvest the ripe, but closed cones with prayerful thoughts, actions, and offerings.

When the cones have dried and opened, place them upright on the ground.

Hit the top of the cones with a carefully-selected, smooth, river-rounded rock.

To make the beads, sand each nut until an opening has been created on each end. For an old-time method, sand against a flat piece of sandstone. For a modern method, use large grit sand paper.

In the absence of an old-time, fine-tipped chert drill bit, push the nutmeat out with a thick-wired paper clip, an idea innovated by the late Vivien Hailstone (Karuk, Yurok, and member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe).



From Shell to Identity Symbol

"It's important to me for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to learn these things, because we didn't know growing up how they did the jewelry.... I'm glad the kids are doing it now, and hopefully it will continue for generations to come."

--Ruth Orta

Ohlones and Miwoks made their earliest beads from whole olivella shells, followed by squared and drilled olivella-shell pieces, and then rounded ones. Rounded and drilled Washington clam shell disk beads and drilled abalone pendants came next.

Ohlones and Miwoks used shell beads and abalone pendants to adorn dance regalia. As valued objects of trade, shell beads and abalone pendants travelled long distances from their point of origin.

Today, Ohlones and Miwoks continue to use shell beads and abalone pendants as elements of ceremonial regalia. They also use them as part of necklaces and jewelry, sometimes made-for-sale.



Drilling Shell

In the old-days, Ohlones and Miwoks drilled holes in shell beads with chert drill bits mounted in hardwood spindles. They spun the spindle back and forth between the palms of their hands while, at the same time, pushing down against the shell.



After Spanish colonization, Ohlones and Miwoks began making "pump drills" by adding a cross-piece to the spindle, fastened with cordage. Metal drill bits, sometimes modified nails, also began to replace those of chert.

Gallery

[pump drill boomerang video]



Cordage →
Acorn Soup →
Soap Root Brush →

Acorn Soup

A Precious and Enduring Food

A Precious and Enduring Food

A Land of Many Foods

Ohlones and Miwoks once harvested and enjoyed more than 100 different types of plant and animal foods. Acorn soup (atole), perhaps the most well known of these, wasn't the only carbohydrate-rich food that they enjoyed. They savored pinole (seed cakes) made from toasted wildflower seeds and grains (grass seeds) as often as acorn soup, mush, and bread, if not more often. Foods made with acorns have a light, nutty flavor.



A Land of Many Foods Now Very Hard to Find

"All of the things that people are doing now are depleting the life of the Earth."
--Ruth Orta

Today's Ohlones and Miwoks can no longer find nor get access to most of their ancestral foods due to more than two centuries of widespread environmental, population, and landscape changes, and due to the early outlawing of Native land management practices.

Native land management practices included the use of prescribed or "cultural burning," which increased the health and numbers of wildflowers and native grasses, and, in turn, the health and numbers of the antelope, elk, and deer that grazed and browsed these plants. They also included specialized digging (cultivation) techniques that increased the health and numbers of bulbs and other edible underground plant parts.



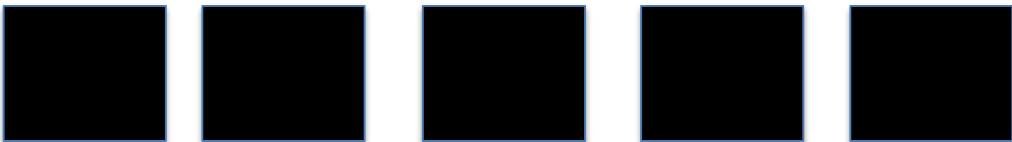
Restoring Acorn Soup Making in Old and New Ways

"It's the flavor of the Earth."
--Ruth Orta

Ruth Orta decided to learn acorn soup making in 1996, after the East Bay Regional Park District hired her and nine other Ohlones to share their history and cultures at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. Although Ruth's ancestors had stopped cooking acorn soup decades earlier, Ruth learned about the old-time techniques from Julia Parker (Pomo/Miwok), then the Cultural Programs Supervisor in Yosemite National Park. A Coyote Hills staff member wrote a book about old-time acorn soup making methods with Julia, who learned these methods from her husband's Yosemite Miwok/Paiute grandmother.

Ruth cooks her acorn soup with the same types of acorns that her own ancestors used for thousands of years—tanoak, black oak, and coast live oak.

Gallery



Cordage →
Beading →
Soaproot Brush →

5 Generations

Jalquin/Saclan Ohlone/Bay Miwok elder Ruth Orta and three other generations of her family share details of their tribal, family, and ancestral history. Learn how despite more than two centuries of upheaval and change, the region’s first people continue to bring their cultures forward into the future.

The Family’s Heart: Trina Marine Ruano

TrinaFamily matriarch Trina Marine Ruano (1902-1986) loved her Native heritage and her huge, extended family. She spent her youngest years living in a modest home at the site of a multi-ethnic Native settlement (“rancheria”) near rural Highway 84, where descendants of the serf-like labor force of a one-time Mexican rancho would soon find themselves displaced to make way for the Calaveras Reservoir.

Old and New Traditions

[needs some kind of intro text]

[Click here to learn more>](#)

Celebrations

Ohlones and Miwoks marked life’s important transitional events with both private and public ritual. Life’s important transitional events continue to bring Ruth’s family together. As in the past, some of these events center on religious observance, such as baptisms and confirmations. Others center on the same types of holiday observances and celebrations familiar to most Americans.

[Click here to learn more>](#)

Foods

Ohlones and Miwoks enjoyed dozens of plant and animal foods, including roasted, steamed, and jerked elk, antelope, and deer meat, and fish and shellfish. Now-rare native food plants once proliferated under Ohlone and Miwok land management practices.

[Click here to learn more>](#)

Creativity

In the old days, beauty permeated even the most mundane aspects of daily life. Nearly every object Ohlones and Bay Miwoks made had creative and artistic qualities, whether an exquisitely woven basket, a finely-chipped and well-formed obsidian arrowhead, or an iridescent abalone pendant. Dance regalia, created with sophisticated and elaborate fiber, feather, shell, and leather work, honored the spirits in everything. Today, Ohlones and Bay Miwoks express their creativity using both old and new materials and methods, as amply attested by the objects displayed in this case.

[Click here to learn more >](#)

Childhood Nurturance

For Ruth and her family, the values of love, responsibility, respect, and caring for ancestors, family, other people, and everything in the natural world continue to inspire and guide their day-to-day lives.

[Click here to learn more >](#)

Work: Past to Present

Several Orta family members, including children and great-grandchildren, participate, or have participated, in ancestral site monitoring. The family wishes this deeply heart-wrenching type of work would someday end, if only developers and agency planners could ever be compelled to create new roads and buildings without digging up ancestors and ancestral sites.

[Click here to learn more>](#)

Religious Practices: Past to Present

Because of the Catholic Church’s association with the late 1700s mission system that devastated Ruth’s people and their culture, some of Ruth’s extended family members choose not to participate in the Catholic Church. Ruth, who attends church faithfully, disdains the mission system as “the downfall of my people.” But she believes that Catholicism’s God is the same one as that of her ancestors, and that it is possible to separate the values and spiritual tenants of Catholic theology from the human failings of the Church.

[Click here to learn more>](#)

Tribal Identity [insert Tribal identity page below-no sub-page]

Activism [inset activism page below-no sub-page]

Politics [insert Politics page below-no sub-page]

Sharing Culture [insert Sharing Cultures page below-no sub-page needed]

The Family's Heart: Trina Marine Ruano

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Trina Marine Ruano: The Early Years

Family matriarch Trina Marine Ruano (1902-1986) loved her Native heritage and her huge, extended family. She spent her youngest years living in a modest home at the site of a multi-ethnic Native settlement ("rancheria") near rural Highway 84, where descendants of the serf-like labor force of a one-time Mexican rancho would soon find themselves displaced to make way for the Calaveras Reservoir.

Trina's mother Avelina Cornates Marine died in 1904; her father Raphel Marine in 1910. The orphaned Trina was sent to St. Mary of the Palms Orphanage, run by the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. At the orphanage, nuns with a kind nature compensated for those with a mean one. When Trina left the orphanage four years later, she had a new family.



Trina Marine Ruano: Marriage and Motherhood

After leaving the orphanage, Trina began a six-year tenure as housekeeper, cook, and baby sitter at a Washington Township ranch where her brother Lucas, who had been sent to a boy's orphanage in Ukiah, now worked in the fields. From there, Trina went to work for "high society people" in San Leandro doing the same type of work for about seven years.

At about age 25, Trina moved to Pismo Beach to work as maid, housekeeper, and cook for the family of a wealthy, tobacco-fortune heir. There Trina met her first husband, who died soon after they married in an automobile accident. Pregnant with her first child, Don Elston, Trina returned to northern California to live with her sister Dolores in Brentwood until Don was born.



Trina Marine Ruano: A Life in Service of Others

Trina next moved to Newark, where she worked as housekeeper for widower Ernest Thompson (b. 1874), who had five children, including a disabled son that Trina took care of. Ernest worked as an SP Railroad drawbridge tender when he married Trina in 1933. Ernest loved children, and he and Trina went on to have three of their own, including Trina's eldest, Ruth (born 1934), whose own large extended family is the subject of this exhibition.

After Ernest died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1939, the twice-widowed Trina married his friend and fellow Dumbarton Bridge worker Yrineo Leonides Ruano, Ruth's "Daddy Joe," with whom she had four more children. Throughout their lives, Trina, Ernest, and Yrineo maintained close relationships with other Native people, and Trina imbued her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren with a sense of pride in heritage, as well as a can-do spirit.

Religious Practices: Past to Present

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE PAST TO PRESENT

Religious Practices Past

Ohlones and Miwoks believed that everything in the world had life and consciousness, whether animate or inanimate. Ohlones and Miwoks honored and gave thanks for everything in the world through prayerful thoughts and actions, adherence to proper rules of behavior, and participation in ceremonial dances.

Ceremonial dances took place at set times of the year, some a recapitulation of sacred time, when the world had its birth. Such ceremonies aided in balancing the forces for ill and good, thereby guarding against natural disaster. Other ceremonies provided a tangible expression of thanks for spring's first fruits and autumn's acorns. Ceremonial dances served as a visible prayer.

Ohlones and Miwoks recognized, and continue to recognize, certain places on the landscape as particularly sacred, including these two peaks, because of their association with events that occurred when the world had its birth. Only specially-initiated spiritual leaders would travel to these peaks, where they prayed for the health and happiness of the people, including their own people.



Religious Practices: Mid-1900s

"My mother refused to go to Catholic Church, except for weddings, baptisms, or funerals. She said, "They are such hypocrites."

—Ruth Orta

"In her mind, our ancestor's religion was superior to any other."

--Ruth Orta about her mother

Trina wanted her children to have a formal Catholic Church education about God, but allowed her children to visit other churches when their "little playmates" invited them to go, so long as those churches preached about God. Ruth vividly recalls a childhood visit by herself and a sister to a Pentecostal service, where some congregants dropped unexpectedly to the ground. Ruth and her sister were so scared, they became "white as a sheet" and never went back. When Trina's children became adults, she encouraged them to choose for themselves which denomination they would belong to.

One aspect of Catholic practice with which Trina disagreed: Confessing her sins to a man who was probably "more crooked than she was." She also disagreed with the inability to bury a non-Catholic in a Catholic cemetery.



Religious Practices Today

"The Natives were more spiritual, and loving, and caring for Mother Earth. I never learned that until I was past 50 years old."

—Ruth Orta

Because of the Catholic Church's association with the late 1700s mission system that devastated Ruth's people and their culture, some of Ruth's extended family members choose not to participate in the Catholic Church. Ruth, who attends church faithfully, disdains the mission system as "the downfall of my people." But she believes that Catholicism's God is the same one as that of her ancestors, and that it is possible to separate the values and spiritual tenants of Catholic theology from the human failings of the Church.

Some of Ruth's extended family members share her views, but aren't practicing Catholics. Others have embraced faiths that came to the place now known as California more recently, including the Presbyterian and Muslim faiths.



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Old and New Traditions

[intro text?]

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Owls as Messengers

In the old days, Ohlones considered great horned owls to be messengers of death. When, in 1994, a concerned Native woman asked that Ruth be warned about an owl perched in a tree above her activity area at the first-ever Gathering of Ohlone Peoples, Ruth was reassuring. She said the owl was the embodiment of her late mother, expressing her approval that Ruth was learning and sharing some of the old ways.

Owls & Family Tradition

“My mom refused to have a picture or figurine of an owl in the house.”
—Ruth’s daughter Roberta, 2016

While Trina Marine Ruano did not continue the ancestral belief of owls as messengers, she taught her children that it was bad luck to have an owl in the house. Not just an actual owl, but any representation, including in magazines.

Ruth not only honors this tradition at home, but also in locations where she conducts cultural presentations. She once asked that an owl figurine be removed from a park where she often presents. Out of respect for Ruth, staff honored her wish.

Belly Buttons

“The one thing that my grandma always did when the babies were born—she would make sure we saved all the belly buttons.... You know how the belly button falls off..., We had to bury it. She believed in that.... That this part of them should go back in the earth.”
—Ruth’s daughter Roberta

Door Knobs & Spiders

“My grandmother...had this superstition about putting things up on a doorknob. I don’t know if it’s because she didn’t like to have things hanging from the doorknob...but to this day, I can’t hang anything on the doorknob! I take it off.”
—Ruth’s daughter Ramona

“Neither can I.... It’s in my soul.”
—Ruth Orta

While it’s unclear why this tradition became family practice, since the old-time houses lacked doorknobs, a cultural proscription against killing spiders centers on respect for living things. As Ruth explains, “I’ll scoop them up...and take them out.... It wasn’t a fear of the spider. You weren’t supposed to kill them because it’s bad luck.”

Respect for Food

In the old days, the values of respect and restraint underpinned all of the rules, laws, and cultural proscriptions that guided everyone’s interactions with the spiritual, natural, and human world.

Perhaps for this reason, economic necessity, and her Catholic orphanage upbringing, Ruth’s mother instilled in her children the need to respect the food that nourished their bodies. Playing with one’s food was forbidden, a value Ruth instilled, in turn, in her own children. As Ruth explains, “Throwing food is wasteful, and God does not want us to be wasteful.”

Celebrations

RITUAL EVENTS PAST

Ohlones and Miwoks marked life's important transitional events with both private and public ritual. Following birth, Ohlone mothers lay with their child on a leaf mattress in a pit lined with heated stones. When Ohlone girls reached puberty, they refrained from eating meat, fish, and salt, and from lifting heavy objects. Ohlone boys received initiation into the datura society. Upon a couple's marriage, the groom's relatives presented a gift to the bride's.

While Ohlones and Miwoks usually reserved music, song, and dance for religious ceremonies, they also sang songs as hunting and love charms. They played musical bows, a stringed instrument plucked with the fingers, in secular contexts.

RITUAL EVENTS PRESENT

Life's important transitional events continue to bring Ruth's family together. As in the past, some of these events center on religious observance, such as baptisms and confirmations. Others center on the same types of holiday observances and celebrations familiar to most Americans. Among the family's favorites: Easter, Fourth of July, Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, and weddings.

Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve provide opportunities for large, extended family reunions. On these days, Ruth's small home overflows with the love, laughter, and easy camaraderie of a multi-generational family used to being together and sharing beer.



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Foods

“Growing up, I remember my mother being in her vegetable garden. She raised rabbits and chickens. We even had goats and ducks.”
—Ruth Orta

FOODS PAST TO PRESENT

Foods Past

Ohlones and Miwoks enjoyed dozens of plant and animal foods, including roasted, steamed, and jerked elk, antelope, and deer meat, and fish and shellfish. Now-rare native food plants once proliferated under Ohlone and Miwok land management practices. These included the regenerative effects of prescribed burning and cultivation through the well-timed and practiced digging of mature bulbs, tubers, corms, and taproots. Other plant foods included steamed fern fiddleheads, fresh and dried fruits, leafy greens, native celeries, nuts, pollens, and carbohydrate-rich seeds and acorns.

“My mother used to tell us food is to be handled with respect and cleanliness.”
—Ruth Orta



Recent Foods, 1939-1950s

Reflective of her self-sufficient times, Trina Marine Ruano canned apricots, cherries, and peaches from her own trees, and pears obtained in Milipitas during visits to Ruth’s Sanchez cousins. Trina also canned nopales (prickly pear cactus). She gathered these with her children on a hillside near Sunol. Trina likewise canned her garden produce, turning these into pickles, pickled vegetables with chili peppers, jams, jellies, and tomato sauce. Trina’s granddaughter Roberta continues the family canning tradition.



Mexican Cuisine

Spanish, Mexican, and early Euro-American colonization brought considerable changes to the foods made and enjoyed by Ohlones and Miwoks. Ruth’s own home-cooked family meals largely consisted of Mexican foods. These included chile verde and colorado, pinto and pink beans, Spanish rice, pasta with tomato sauce and onions, flour tortillas, burritos (called “tacos” by the family), and menudo, all minus the sour cream and chocolate mole of “California-ized” versions. Today, tamales made with homemade masa and meat fillings grace many family tables during special events, the cornhusks now store bought.

Learning Mexican Cooking

Ruth’s mother Trina Marine Ruano learned Mexican cooking in her early thirties from her Godmother Margaret Peña (Ohlone and Delta Yokuts). Ruth, in turn, learned Mexican cooking from her mother, who she followed into the kitchen from age six. Ruth later added enchiladas to her repertoire, as learned from her mother-in-law.

Ruth made tortillas daily for her husband, since he would only take burritos to work, never sandwiches. When a Tortilla Factory opened near Ruth’s Newark home, she declared, “I’m done!” And she was!

Creativity

Artistic Expression Past to Present

In the old days, beauty permeated even the most mundane aspects of daily life. Nearly every object Ohlones and Bay Miwoks made had creative and artistic qualities, whether an exquisitely woven basket, a finely-chipped and well-formed obsidian arrowhead, or an iridescent abalone pendant. Dance regalia, created with sophisticated and elaborate fiber, feather, shell, and leather work, honored the spirits in everything.

Today, Ohlones and Bay Miwoks express their creativity using both old and new materials and methods, as amply attested by the objects displayed in this case.



Bridging Past and Present

"I told my cousin maybe I should make soaproot brush earrings, and she said, "Come on, Mona, who's gonna wear soaproot brush earrings? ...But I won't listen to her again. ...I couldn't make enough...."

—Ruth's daughter Ramona

Ramona "Mona" Garibay learned to make soaproot brushes in 1996 from Coyote Hills Regional Park Naturalist Beverly Ortiz, who learned to make them from Central California elders. Mona later innovated specialized methods to make miniature soaproot brush earrings and pins. She sold her earrings and pins for the first time, along with full-sized brushes, as a fund raiser for the Annual Gathering of Ohlone Peoples hosted at Coyote Hills by the East Bay Regional Park District.



Tinkering

"I'm constantly working on or modifying something, because I'm mechanically inclined.... If something breaks, I usually fix it so...it's better than the way they designed it. I love tinkering.... I love making jewelry out of beads."

--Ruth's daughter Ramona

Portrait of a Family Artist

Ruth's granddaughter Melanie C. Lacy Kusters received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2005 from the San Francisco Art Institute and her Masters of Fine Art in 2007 from the California College of Arts and Crafts. She is Based in San Francisco



Artistic Inspiration

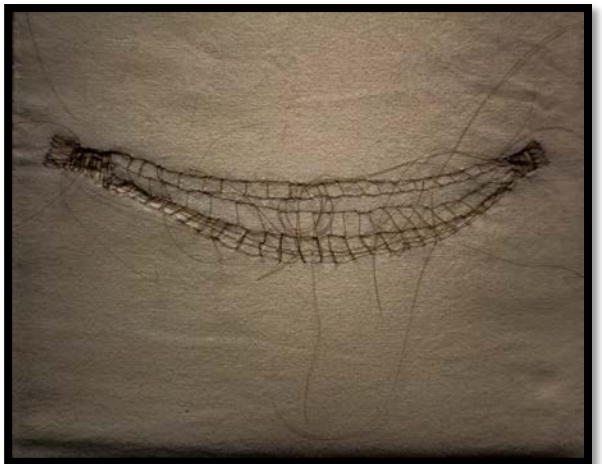
Melanie's embroideries contain only portions of original photographs, with faces often left blank, symbolic of memory. Her work, like memory itself, focuses on visceral feelings, and on our interconnected relationships, rather than exacting reproduction of history.

Embroidered Vintage Pillowcases

"Objects carry meaning, whether they are strands of DNA that trace your ancestry, or vintage fabric imbued with personal history."

--Ruth's granddaughter Melanie

Melanie draws inspiration from her personal and family history. Two of her hair pieces on display here are examples of her focus on intensely personal topics. Melanie uses her own hair to embroider the outlines of her family's photographs on vintage pillow cases. Her literal weaving of herself into a medium that predates her serves as symbolic representation of how each of us integrate into a line of ancestors that stretches beyond memory.



Symbols of Identity

In the old-days, Ohlones and Miwoks wore necklaces made with gray pine nut beads, clamshell disk beads, and abalone pendants as elements of dance regalia. The dances were a form of visible prayer.

Today, in addition to regalia, necklaces made with old-time materials, as well as modern glass and plastic beads, express cultural identity. Friends of Ruth Orta made the necklaces displayed here.



Gallery:



Childhood Nurturance

LOVE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND CARING

In the old days, Ohlones and Miwoks began learning at a young age about the many rules, laws, and cultural proscriptions that enabled them, and their ancestors, to live in the same place for thousands of years without feeling the need to go anywhere else.

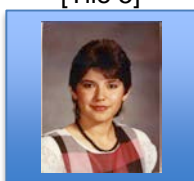
Theirs was a complex world of nested relationships, all guided by the values of respect and restraint—a world of relationships that interconnected every person with creation; with the land and all of its other inhabitants; with their ancestors and the elders and community specialists who were the knowledge bearers and teachers of each generation; and with each other, extended family, community, and tribe.

For Ruth and her family, the values of love, responsibility, respect, and caring for ancestors, family, other people, and everything in the natural world continue to inspire and guide their day-to-day lives.

[Tile 1]



[Tile 5]



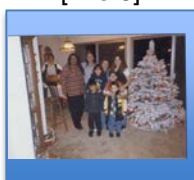
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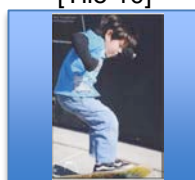
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[Tile 6]



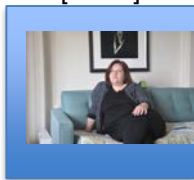
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[Tile 3]



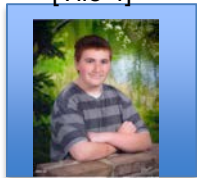
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[Tile 11]



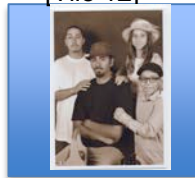
[Tile 4]



[Tile 8]



[Tile 12]



[flipping tiles-pics on one side & quotes on the other-see below]

Tile 1

Flip these tiles to find out more about what it means to be part of this very large and very close Ohlone and Miwok family, as four of its five generations share the lessons and values they cherish most in their lives, and the enduring importance of heritage. [text on both sides-no picture]

Tile 2

"I'm responsible for my family that I brought to this earth."
--Ruth Orta

Tile 3

"I love learning about the history of my ancestors. I have learned that their culture revolved around the word 'RESPECT.' For me this word sums up what it means to be an Ohlone."
--Ruth's daughter Ramona

Tile 4

"What makes my family so important to me is that we're so close and we talk so often.... Whenever I need anything I can always just turn to them."
--Ruth's grandson David

Tile 5

"Being Indian means re-strengthening family ties that have been loosened by the demands of the modern world, the bonds of family now secured with cordage string. My daughter and I learn from our elders as they take our hands and place them in the earth, digging up soaproot and finding much more."
--Ruth's granddaughter Desra

Tile 6

"Since I was a child, I've always known I was Ohlone. My grandmother and mother always told me stories. I love my land, and I love my people. When I have children, I'll tell them the same stories."
--Ruth's granddaughter Gloria

Tile 7

"A lot of us are finding it's very important for us to still make our presence known."
--Ruth's granddaughter Melanie

Tile 8

"It's important for me to carry on Ohlone traditions and history through the generations. My great-grandmother Trina Ruano and my grandmother Ruth Orta taught me always to be proud of who I was and where I came from.... It's crucial for me to teach my children, and other children in schools, about our history, so my ancestors will never be forgotten, and people will realize we're still here."
--Ruth's granddaughter Sabrina

Tile Quote 9

"I want to learn everything I can, and develop my abilities in making all the things they did, including gathering the plants and turning them into such beautiful and useful things as soaproot brushes, hand-made string, basketry and so much more. I know it will take me a long time to master all the details, and I look forward to what the future holds."
--Ruth's granddaughter Rita

Tile Quote 10

"I love the projects we do together. They bring the family together. We inspire each other and others to learn our culture and history."
--Ruth's great-grandson Alfred

Tile Quote 11

"I really like singing Ohlone songs, playing the clapper sticks, and now I'm learning to make baskets. When I go to Ohlone gatherings, I help my great-grandma Ruth Orta teach people how to make acorn soup."
--Ruth's great-granddaughter Ariana

Tile Quote 12

"I love learning about the animals and the history of my ancestors."

Work

Work Past

Contrary to popular presumption that early-day Native lives centered on survival, Ohlones and Miwoks of the past had more free time than we do today, their “work” accomplished at a much more relaxed, unhurried pace than today.

Likewise contrary to popular presumption, individual members of Native society could not survive on their own. Community, gender, and age roles varied. Certain community members excelled at making or doing particular things. Other community members received specialized training in particular aspects of community life, such as leadership, ceremony, tribal history, healing, and the making of certain objects, like fishing nets, that others paid for the right to use or have.

Work: Late 1800s-1940s

“The little ones would sit in apricot boxes or tomato boxes, because we all went to work with my mom. When we used to go and work in the fields, nobody stayed home.”
--Ruth Orta

After colonization, Native people lived on the margins of society as a virtual slave labor force. Following the 1860s outlawing of American-era “Indian Apprenticeship Acts,” Native men continued doing agricultural and ranch work. Native women continued to work as maids, cooks, childcare workers, and in the fields.

Turn-of-the-century industry created other employment opportunities, including railroad track, bridge, and chemical plant work for Ruth’s father and step-father. Ruth’s mother worked as a maid, housekeeper, and cook. She also harvested tomatoes and fruit with her children.

Work: Late 1940s-present

After her marriage at age 16, Ruth worked in hospital food service, a canary, a fa
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Ruth’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren have worked as roofers, welders, auto mechanics, warehouse lift operators, electronics assembly workers, food service workers, and dispatchers. Daughter Ramona once worked as a warehouse. Granddaughter Ruthie Orta is a female forklift operator in a warehouse. Granddaughter Ruthie Orta is the only female ATM machine repair person in a large region of the country.



Cultural Work

Several Orta family members, including children and great-grandchildren, participate, or have participated, in ancestral site monitoring. The family wishes this deeply heart-wrenching type of work would someday end, if only developers and agency planners could ever be compelled to create new roads and buildings without digging up ancestors and ancestral sites.

Site monitoring involves identifying and documenting cultural resources whenever they are discovered. Site monitoring is a process that remains and



Ruth Orta's family's ancestors spoke Chochenyo, a dialect of one of the six Ohlone languages. They also spoke Bay Miwok and Plains Miwok, the primary languages of the Native people of the present-day Diablo Valley and Sacramento Valley.

Activism

"We want to protect the places where our ancestors had villages.... I do what I can to try and prevent people from harming these places."

--Ruth's daughter

Ramona

ANCESTRAL SITE PROTECTION AND THE LAW

Prior to the 1970s, Ohlones and Miwoks had no legal grounds to prevent the bulldozing of burial, sacred, village, and other cultural sites to make way for development. Laws aimed at protecting tribal cultural places from development, first passed in the 1970s, helped in some ways. But because these laws framed Native cultural places as archaeological sites, "scientific study" of the sites enabled bulldozing to continue.



DEFENDING ANCESTRAL SITES FROM DEVELOPMENT

While supportive of scientific study of tribal cultural places in certain limited situations, Ruth and her family members prefer that these places remain undisturbed. Toward this end, they speak at public hearings, write letters, and join coalitions of Native and non-Native people to advocate for the full protection of Ohlone and Bay Miwok tribal cultural places in federal, state, county, city, special district, and private ownership throughout their ancestral homelands.

NOT OUR SAINT

Catholic priest Junipero Serra founded nine of California's 21 missions, including Mission San Jose, where Ruth's ancestors lived following Spanish colonization. In September 2015, Pope Francis canonized Serra.

For Ruth and other family members, Serra not only symbolizes the pain and suffering following the destruction of their homelands, but also those who haunt them to this day.



For this reason, Ruth and other family members made their opposition to canonization known by attending and speaking at seminars and rallies aimed at preventing canonization and educating people about the impacts of the mission system on their people.

"I don't want him to be a saint."

--Ruth's daughter Ramona

Politics

POLITICAL SYSTEMS PAST

Old-time Ohlone and Miwok political systems were among the most equalitarian ever known in human history worldwide. Headmen, and sometimes headwomen, fed visitors, provided for those in need, oversaw ceremonial events, and directed hunting, fishing, and gathering activities and warfare expeditions.

The headman or woman and a council of elders primarily served as community advisors. Although the former inherited their positions, accession to office required community approval.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS PRESENT

“I’m a Democrat, because I’m poor.”

--Ruth’s daughter Ramona



Ruth and the voting-age members of her family self-identify as democrats, liberals, and independents. They have a strong belief in the American political system, including the power for change through the voting box.

Sharing culture

RESPECTING ELDER

“The Honoring of the Elders is about family. We show the young ones that we honor and treasure our Grandparents, Aunties and Uncles who have taught us about family, our culture and our values.”

Page



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Today, Native elders retain a respected place in family and community life. In 2006, Ruth received public recognition as a respected Ohlone woman elder during an honoring ceremony hosted at Indian Canyon, near Hollister, the only trust land set aside for Ohlones by the federal government. In 2013, the conveners of the annual Honoring of the Elders Gathering at Mount Madonna Regional Park also recognized Ruth as an honored elder.

The Mount Madonna Elders Gathering, first held in June 1985, is co-hosted by the intertribal, non-profit Tena Council and the Pajaro Valley Ohlone Indian Council.

“We want them to know that we’re still here—five generations of people connected to the original people.”

--Ruth Orta

Ruth Orta and several members of her family relish the opportunity to share their people’s history and culture with the broader world. Through public presentations about their family and their people’s cultural legacy, they seek to address enduring misperceptions that Ohlones and Miwoks no longer exist, and to address stereotypes that genericize and dehumanize Native people. They also seek to call attention to old-time cultural values that address modern issues, such as the need to better understand and respect the environment.



DISPELLING STEREOTYPES THROUGH PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Ruth and members of her family began making public presentations about their ancestral cultural legacy in 1994, during the first-ever Gathering of Ohlone peoples at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont. In addition to presentations at subsequent Ohlone Gatherings, they have also presented at national, state, and local parks; museums and veteran’s facilities; grade schools, colleges, and universities; and twice at the annual California Indian Conference.

Other Ohlones have also called upon Ruth and her family members to participate in cultural events, and to teach them how to make cultural objects, such as soaproot brushes.