



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“To accomplish our mission MOCHA provides opportunities for children to explore their creativity; designs, implements and advocates for hands-on arts education; and places an emphasis on reaching children and families from low-income communities.”

-Museum of Children’s
Art (MOCHA) program
statement

It was obvious the minute I walked into the Museum of Children’s Art (MOCHA) gallery that this was a place devoted to the concept of bringing art and children together. The low tables, with pure white sheets of paper laid out, ready for little hands to pick up a brush or pen; the paint-splattered wall; the brightly-colored child-sized plastic chairs; the plastic tub full of play dough; the jar of many-hued tissue paper flowers; and even the turquoise stuffed animal – possible a gorilla? – holding a large yellow crayon and peeking through a high up window: All of these tell any visiting child it is okay to sit yourself down and get to work. And in fact, one small boy did just that as I was watching. Without hesitation, he seated himself carefully and erectly on a chair, picked up a fat youngster-sized pen and started meticulously drawing.

I also noticed a woman and two children sitting on

beanbag chairs in an adjoining room, reading a few of the many appealing children’s books housed in a easily accessed bookcase. It gave me pleasure, as a librarian, to see the creativity of hands-on art combined with the joy of reading or being read to.

I was visiting the gallery for the last day of their annual 3-month show called “Once Upon a Time.” This exhibition provides visitors with a chance to see original illustrations from children’s books, as well as works from the artists’ childhoods. It was inspiring to see the juxtaposition of the two and I recognized many of the books and the illustrators.

What I hadn’t realized, however, was the range of activities and programs at MOCHA. While there, I picked up their Winter 2006 schedule of events and spent a few minutes talking to Rae Holzman, who is the Director of Public Programs. One of the upcoming programs is the

collaboration between MOCHA and the Oakland Public Library in the One City, One Book campaign, which will run from January until February 10. On January 28, MOCHA will offer a “Henna Hands” workshop for children, while parents discuss Chitra Divakaruni’s “Mistress of Spices.”

In addition, MOCHA has drop in art activities for ages 18 months and up, with a fee of \$5 per child – no fee for the accompanying adult. I took a look at the downstairs studio where most of the drop-in art play goes on and it was a wonderful space, with bins of materials, a new playhouse, those same low tables and chairs and lots of colors, art and light. A Miles Davis tape played softly, and it beautifully mingled with the up-and-down tones of the children’s voices. It was difficult not to sit my own self down and start creating shapes from the sand play

dough resting in metal pans on one of the tables.

Other programs offered by MOCHA are the Artist in Residency Program and what is called “MOCHA to Go” – an opportunity to have interactive art stations at an event or special occasion.

MOCHA is located at 538 9th Street, in the courtyard of Swan’s Marketplace, and the telephone number there is 510-465-8770.

One unexpected outcome for me of visiting MOCHA was a much-needed respite from the stresses of daily life the past few weeks. Sometimes it is easy to forget the curative effect of being surrounded by the vibrancy of art in the making. For me, anyway, being in that light-filled room, full of opportunity and invitation, was just the solace I needed.