

# The Berkeley Daily Planet

## Remembering Rae Louise Hayward

*By Paula M. Price (01-22-08)*

This is hard. To write about a dear friend's passing before her absence has fully sunk in is quite a challenging task. What I can easily write about is what I know about Rae; who she was and what she meant to me and so many others in the arts community.

Born in New Orleans and reared in Los Angeles, Rae attended Pepperdine College and received her art degree from Cal State Northridge. After moving to the Bay Area in 1987, she took on her "day job" at Pac Bell, moving up the corporate ladder while she created beautiful pastels and paintings inspired by a trip to West Africa.

Like many other artists of color, Rae witnessed a lack of representation in major art galleries and museums. Actually, this exclusion of black and brown artists generally begins in elementary school and continues throughout college. When I was a student at UC Berkeley in the 1970s, the entire art department faculty was white male and the only cultures represented in art history and aesthetics courses were European and Asian. I felt invisible.

Years later, I was delighted to discover The Art of Living Black (TAOLB), an annual celebration of African-American artists co-founded by Rae Louise Hayward and Jan Hart-Schuyers in 1997.

Each year nearly 100 black painters, sculptors, photographers, mixed media and crafts makers display their art at the Richmond Art Center. To walk into this space overflowing with vibrant colors, arresting forms, subtle lines and uniquely interwoven beads, fibers and leaves and listen to the conversations and laughter and feel the warmth and joy emanating from all who are present is no less than magical. As was Rae.

"Rae was The Art of Living Black," attests Jeannette Madden, a fine artist and long-time TAOLB participant.

"She was a masterpiece," says Latisha Baker. "When she walked into a room she lit up the place ... her gracefulness, her presence. And she was so open to all art forms. When I began my work as a pyrographer (burning images into wood), no one else around was doing it. She inspired me to go forward with my art and experiment."

Conceptual artist Karen Carraway-Senefuru agrees. "Rae created a place that allowed us to strip down ornamentation to reach our essence. She encouraged freedom of expression."

Rae was a vision. Her natural beauty adorned by unusual jewelry, classic scarves and tasteful attire radiated a certain creative elegance that could be seen in her artwork as well. A striking balance of rich colors and forms, Rae's work is often geometric, always well thought out. Rae, who was full of praise and encouragement when it came to other artists, was humble about her own artwork. So it followed that very few knew just how ill she was. Diagnosed with cancer in October of 2007, Rae quietly began planning her own service while she continued to work on this year's TAOLB exhibit.

Karen Carraway-Senefuru, who also creates incredible handmade dolls, was working on a new doll when she heard of Rae's transition. Karen hadn't made a doll in quite awhile and Rae had been encouraging her to do so.

"I had a bead in my hand and was applying it to cover up some negative space and thinking 'Rae is going to love this' when I heard," Karen told me. I gave Karen a hug and told her that I would take over where Rae left off—that I would call her and bug her until she created yet another masterpiece out of beads and cloth and spirit.

And I will. It's up to us, after all. It is up to each one of us to support and encourage each other to take our individual talent as far as we possibly can. I believe this is what Rae would have wanted: for us to continue to love and support TAOLB by working as hard and selflessly as she did to make it stronger and more successful each year. We of TAOLB promise you, Rae, to do our very best. We love you.

The Art of Living Black

Feb. 5-March 14. Artists' reception

Saturday, Feb. 9, 3-5 p.m. Richmond Art Center, 2540 Barrett Ave.,  
Richmond.

620-6772.