

ForeWord Reviews

ForeWord Clarion Review

CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

Messages Found with the Carving Knife

Pam Maneeratana

CreateSpace

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Five Star (out of Five)

The Thai tradition of fruit and vegetable carving, or *Kae-Sa-Luk*, is showcased in Pam Maneeratana's book *Messages Found with the Carving Knife*. While not an instructional book, this volume is a good visual introduction to this ancient art of carving. It displays the range of intricate patterns and structures that the artist fashions out of common fruits and vegetables and will be an inspiration to crafters, caterers and artists. Each photo of the artist's carvings is balanced with a short statement about her artistic motives and personal philosophy, so this book also has appeal as an inspirational title.

Maneeratana immigrated to the United States from her native Bangkok with her restaurateur husband and found that the meditative aspects of planning and executing her increasingly more elaborate carvings was a welcome respite. She had studied *Kae-Sa-Luk* as a school girl but was not interested in practicing the art until she began to create garnishes and centerpieces for the family restaurant. Her passion led the author to produce several DVDs about carving techniques, teach master classes and travel around the U.S., giving lectures and demonstrations.

Shot against the tropical vegetation of her new Florida home, Maneeratana's exquisitely carved sculptures are perfectly captured in numerous color photographs by Shauna Lillywhite. Many examples sport geometric or botanical surface patterns, while other carvings are more sculptural and rendered in images of fanciful birds, teapots, exotic flowers or mushrooms. The vegetable kingdom is well-represented by the variously-transformed squashes, melons, and every

sort of root vegetable. Carrots become goggle-eyed goldfish; a shapely eggplant gets a full skirt of cascading leaves; jalapeños turn into curly lilies with seedpod centers.

Watermelon carvings really highlight Maneeratana's masterful skills. She is able to subtly use the inner rind of the watermelons to highlight the outlines of her delicate forms. And then there are the pumpkins! No mere grinning jack-o-lanterns here; pumpkin carving is taken to new heights with nighttime images of Maneeratana's illuminated lanterns adorned with intricately carved demons, spiders, flowers, feline faces and spiral motifs.

As Maneeratana notes, the carving process is more important than the final perishable artwork.

“Every time I carve, I concentrate on each cut, one after another...After an hour of concentration on each cut and planning for the next cut, my mind is isolated from any worries—and I am fulfilled. I achieved my goal—a clear mind. The beauty of the carved fruit is a wonderful by-product.”

Another fantastic by-product of Maneeratana's time spent carving is this very book. It will introduce Western readers to *Kae-Sa-Luk* and to the creative possibilities of fruit and vegetable carving. It is like reading the equivalent of a fireworks display, with so many displays of visual bravura leading up to a finale of awe-inspiring images.

Rachel Jagareski