

# 1000 AWESOME THINGS ABOUT CURAÇAO

## Chichi by Serena Israel

#993

A sweet fifth grader at the International School of Curaçao proudly showed off the mini Chichi (pronounced 'Cheechee') she keeps in her cubby: "Chichi is an amazing sculpture made in Curaçao. A lot of us Curaçao women can relate to her because she's got a real woman's body. I think Chichi is an amazing thing of Curaçao 'cause I can find her all over. Also a lot of times when you go to Jan Thiel (Beach) you can see tourists near or on Chichi, because anyone can fit in Chichi's lap!"

Serena Israel is a mold-maker by craft and a linguist by design. Chichi, eldest daughter, sister, and caregiver in Papiamentu, is her most famous mold and interpretation. A plump black woman made of plaster, voluptuous asymmetrical breasts, hips and bottom, her arms extend to draw you in. Serena speaks her own language: a mix of German, English, a little bit of Dutch and Spanish... and some Papiamentu. But she understands us all, rather well. Chichis are painted by as many as 30 local women and their backgrounds make up Curaçao's cultural collage: European, South American, Central American, African,

mixed, etc. "Chichi's mold is just half the work; the paint really rounds her out. I don't know where I'd be without my painters!" Serena admits. Serena provides multi-lingual workshops as well as weekly (unpainted) mold drop offs and (painted) mold pickups at Chichi painters' homes to accommodate their busy lifestyles. Chichi painters, in turn, take much pride in their work and consider this creative outlet self-imposed structured "me" time, time to channel their feelings by tracing Chichi's round body in colorfully creative designs (Curaçao architecture, flowers, trees, pop culture, whatever they happen to dream up that day)



Serena distributes painted Chichis to local art galleries and craft shops (Mon Art in Riffort – Otrobanda, Chichi store in Gomezplein – Punda, Serena's Art Factory – St. Joris) and Chichi painters take pride in exhibiting and selling their work. Their "Chichi money" often represents

second or third sources of income; set aside to pay utility bills or treat their entire family to delicious restaurant meals.

All Chichis are alike in form, but each expresses her own awesome individuality through colorful designs, cultural nuances and most interestingly, haphazard (paint brush) imperfections. Chichis bring people together: providing a vulnerable blank canvas as well as a sometimes crazy, often warm, lady to interpret. Serena only imposes one deliberate (fashion) restriction: all Chichis have to be barefoot. "80% of Chichis would have shoes painted

on in the beginning [2007]. I understand why, the painters are proud and respect the process, they respect Chichi, how can she be barefoot? Whereas Europeans and Americans idealize 'barefoot and fancy-free', associate no shoes with warmth and relaxation, the Caribbean lifestyle. Needless to say, it took a lot of explaining and understanding; most of the women never had someone tell them that barefoot is desirable!"

Though Chichi was born in Curaçao and is often considered the epitome of yu'i Kòrsou matriarch, she's a compilation of Serena's extensive world travel and diverse cultural sampling (Germany, England, Portugal, Spain, Canary Islands, Senegal, Gambia, Cape Verde, Barbados, finally Curaçao) as well as numerous artistic inspirations. When you first meet Serena, you'll be surprised to find a petite white woman with beautiful bouncy auburn hair. Yet this very woman felt most at home in Africa "eating with bare hands, sitting in the compound with bare breasts, playing and singing to the drums."

No one made her feel white in Africa, they simply accepted her. "When you're open to culture, people let you in. When they see you respect their rules, wear their clothes, they take you in. No prejudice. No racism."

## Curaçao Info

### Art Galleries

**Carib Fine Art**  
Hotel Kura Hulanda  
Langestraat 8  
Tel. 465-5759

**D'art Gallery**  
Bitterstraat 11/Werfstraat 6  
Tel. 462-8680

**Gallery Alma Blou**  
Landhuis Habaai, Frater  
Radulphusweg 4  
Tel. 462-8896

**Gallery John Baselmans**  
Dokterstuin 237  
Tel. 864-3595

**Gallery Mon Art**  
Riffort unit 103  
Tel. 462-2977

**Jean Girigori Gallery**  
Riffort unit 205

Tel. 461-8205  
**Landhuis Bloemhof**  
Santa Rosaweg 6  
Tel. 737-5775

**Nena Sanchez Gallery**  
Bloempot Shopping Center  
Tel. 738-2377

**Open Atelier**  
F.D. Rooseveltweg 443  
Tel. 868-6027

**Ritz Gallery**  
Scharlooweg 25  
Tel. 465-9950

**Yubi Kirindongo**  
Kaya Reis 390  
Tel. 869-3268

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Masha danki to Fundashon Bon Intenshon and Ennia for sponsoring this Labor of Love."

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