

Block Notes

Les Enfants de Luang Prabang



ARIANNA CAROLI

THE RAJA PROJECT



SIGNORE, GUIDA LA MIA MANO
PERCHE' QUALUNQUE COSA IO FACCIA
SIA OPERA DI LUCE

Giacobbe

*LORD, GUIDE MY HAND
SO WHATEVER I DO IS
A WORK OF LIGHT*

Jacob



For Raja

'We have arrived'. The driver gets out of the taxi to open the door for me. I am about to face the hundreds of steps leading to the top of the sacred mountain.

Up there, closer to the sky, awaits for us the gigantic statue of Mahavira, the Tirtankara venerated by the Jain people. Gathering here from remote regions of India, they bring to the naked God precious offerings and prayers.

I have been traveling a long way to accomplish this pilgrimage myself. I feel moved and nervous at the same time... preoccupied because the ascent appears to be tough and the steps at this time of the day are incandescent.

Looking out of the car window, the smile of the most beautiful young man strikes me like a lightening bolt. What a precious face, almost sculpted in ancient amber. Stars are sparkling in his eyes, his teeth are pure pearls.

Enchanted, I grab my camera: this is a portrait to be taken immediately. I hold my breath ready to shoot and make this moment 'immortal', but I hesitate. There is something weird, something wrong in the whole scene.

I look again.

The magnificent head rests over the powerful torso of a young man, the torso rests... over a wooden cart with four wheels. Nothing else. Wrapped around his hands are strings of leather.

What to say... I feel lost.

The small crowd of beggars backs up to let me out of the car. They all extend their hands to beg. He does too. I walk. They all walk behind me. He pushes his cart.

'Coca Cola' is my answer to brake the embarrassment. Everybody has his bottle and I sit on the step of the little shop close to the young man who is standing on his cart.

Everyday he takes a bus to come to this place because the generosity of the devotees and tourists is the only hope for his survival.

'What is your name?' I ask.

'My name is Raja'.

What a cruel irony: Raja means King.

I hold tears while my heart begins to fly high.

In this exact moment I promise to myself that I will do something good, something beautiful to bring moments of joy in the life of the many Rajas I will meet on the way.

And THE RAJA PROJECT begins here.

Shravanabenagola, India, February 2004.

Hundreds of images in my files: The Gallery of the Portraits taken on my journeys is a beautiful, large one.

But I miss one face. I never had the courage to ask Raja to look at my camera.

This portrait never taken is the inspiration.

Raja's portrait is in each page of each of my RAJA PROJECT books.

Thank you dear friend: one day I will come back, I will find you at the bottom of the sacred steps and I will ask you to look at my camera and smile.

Just smile for me. And this time I will not feel nervous.

You did great, and I am doing great thanks to you.

Raja, King.





**Whatever we do
is a drop
in the Ocean
but if we
don't do it
that drop
will be lost
forever**

Mother Theresa

Laos





 ໂຮງຮຽນແຕກກາພາ
ແຂວງຫລວງພະບາງ 
ÉCOLE ORPHELINAT
ORPHANAGE SCHOOL
LUANG PRABANG
ອຸປະຖຳໂດຍ: ນາງ ດວງປິ-ນາງ ດວງດີ ໄຊຍະວິງ

Les Enfants de Luang Prabang

“Every Saturday I go to the Orphanage to teach basketball: it makes me feel great to see them laughing” “Orphanage?” “One of many in the area, unfortunately... Three hundred fifty kids aged from four to eighteen, real orphans or those just abandoned by the families, often they have survived in the woods for weeks, some of them shocked by horrific experiences. The Government gives the Orphanage perhaps 40 cents every day for each child, to cover food and education: you can just imagine.” Meeting Ken –the monk for one year– (but this is a different story) in the Vat under the protection of Unesco is a present from the Universe. Immediately I feel that I have to go to the orphanage and do ‘something’, but in two hours I will take the plane to fly back to Bangkok. There is no time even to visit the place. I feel powerless. “You will do something for them” Ken reassures me. I promise him that I will be back in one month and he promises me he will talk to the director of the institution about the Italian artist who wants to meet the children. What can I do for them? They need food, clothes, showers and toilets... They also need to have fun. For now I can paint with them and make them smile. Maybe. The Universe is generous with me: I am back in Luang Prabang one month later with a huge suitcase, ready to do something even if I do not know exactly what. Ken is waiting for me dressed in the orange robe and the director of the orphanage has granted Arianna permission to do voluntary work at the orphanage. The verandah outside the crafts room will be my *atelier*. I also get an assistant who can translate my English: the crafts teacher. We unroll two straw carpets on the wooden floor and I start taking the magical boxes out of the suitcase. I see kids looking at my actions from a distance. I know that they are not used to trusting people so much, anymore. They have already been abandoned at least once. Surprise. Suddenly the atelier is filled with children. I am nervous, my heart is beating while I keep smiling, smiling. Very soon the verandah is a fantastic workshop. Small groups of artists are painting in different spaces of the same large piece of paper, happy to squeeze the new tubes of colors, to share the

brushes. Some of them are just watching. “How can I teach instant painting... how is it possible to get nice pieces of artwork in two hours” I ask myself, nervous because I feel that we are not going anywhere. I wanted to make them excited with some ‘instant’ results. “Would you like to use these beautiful scissors and cut small squares out of this large painting?” I ask a boy next to me and I see the light in his eyes again. Not everybody likes to paint: cutting the right piece in the right corner can be a different way of making art.

Now the activity in the porch is almost frantic and very soon we have many small masterpieces on display on the table. We all love it. Finally the idea is to create very special, unique, elegant, creative cards to be sold, for now, to the tourists staying in the luxury Hotels in town. Any extra dollar can help the Orphanage.

So I need one more group of artists: the ‘gluers’. I notice a little boy –six, seven years old– with a funny-shaped head. He stays next to me all the time, just watching. I assemble the first card myself and immediately he understands the plan and starts working holding the Uhu tube. Nobody is allowed at his table. “Sticky, Sticky, you are Sticky, sticky like the rice!”. From now on he becomes my chief assistant. We understand each other perfectly. Thanks to him we soon have two new groups of artists: the ‘frame painters’ and the ‘signature makers’. Being so busy with the glue, Sticky hands the card to the next boy or girl who has to paint a frame around the artwork. The last step is the signature in Laos character and the third group is in charge of it. “How do you say BUTTERFLY in Lao?”

“MEENGHAH BHUA”. “Well, now we paint butterflies, can you do it?” Of course they can: out of magic the most unconventional poetic butterflies become alive on the paper.

Look at them.

Ken is beside me. No need for words. I am smiling and crying at the same time. How lucky I feel to be blessed with this experience.

How many beautiful cards...

Perhaps it is the beginning of something else.

















We paint a frame around the artwork.



The last step is the signature in Laos characters.









Sticky

He looks at me only when he thinks I am not looking at him. The boy is studying this artist woman who is running around in his territory giving colors and papers and getting everybody to paint. People come to the orphanage, they bring presents and spend some time with you. They hug you, they play and promise to come back soon. Then they leave. Most of the time they do not come back. Once again your heart breaks. It is better not to get attached to anyone. Each time It gets more difficult to trust a stranger.

This little one finally comes to the art space.

He is not interested in painting, but as soon as the table is covered with beautiful little masterpieces on paper, he knows what to do. Holding a huge UHU tube he starts gluing the pieces onto the blank cards. Very soon he is my first assistant.

“Here, Sticky... There, Sticky”. He becomes very popular.



My new art assistant is in charge of glueing the cards and hanging the artwork in the 'gallery'.

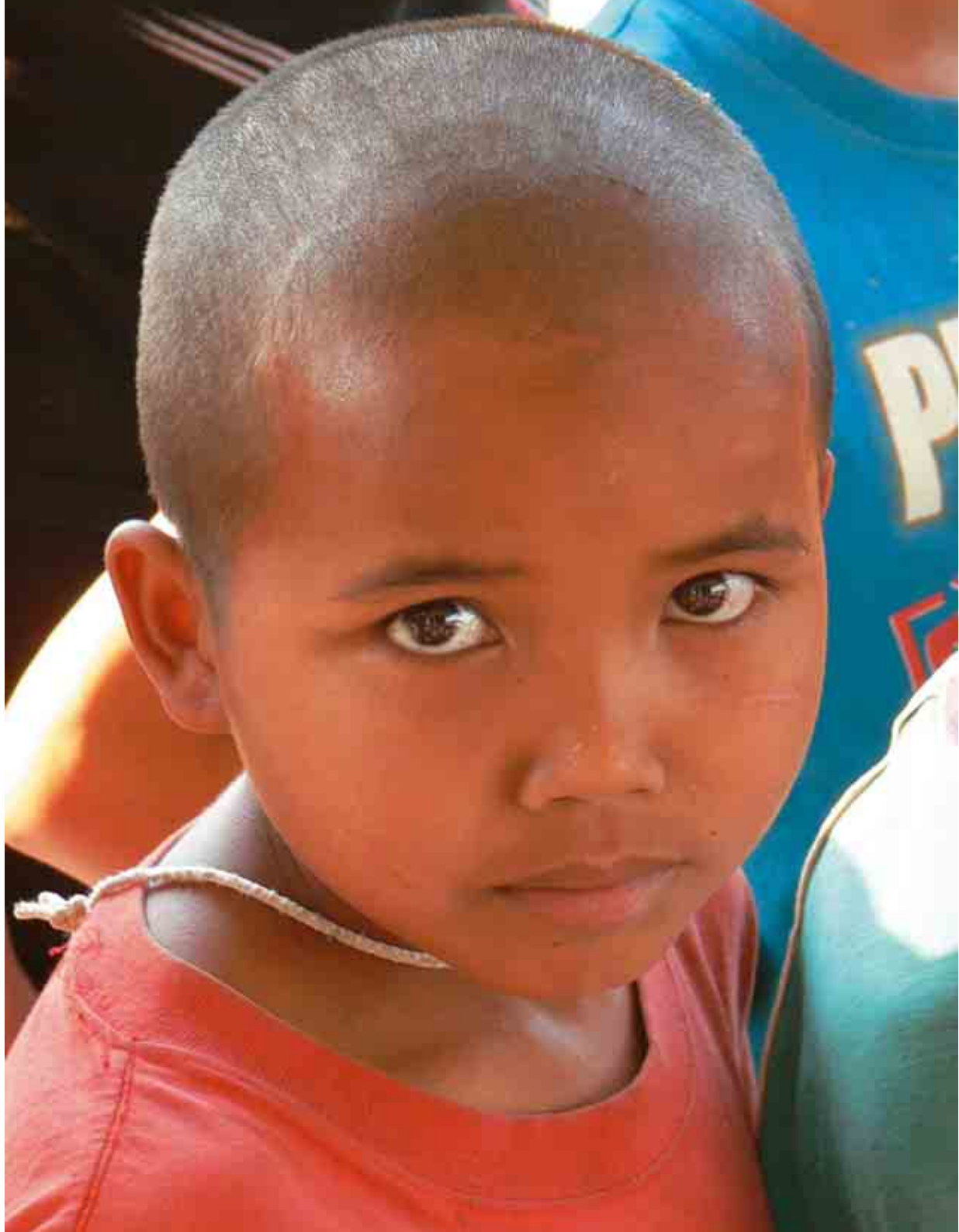




“How do you say Butterfly in Lao?” “We call them Meenghah Bhua”. Well, now we paint butterflies.















We play with the masking tape to make body art.









Shirley
23/2/07





22 FEB 2007
22 FEB 2007

painted by... STICKY

ORPHANAGE SCHOOL
BAN MA LUANG PRABANG
LAO LDR

Tel: 071

So many beautiful cards. Perhaps it is the beginning of something else.





Les Enfants de Luang Prabang

One month later I am back in Luang Prabang. Rainy has joined me in this trip to bring toys from Bangkok for the children, to buy things for them at the Chinese market and to be my assistant in the art workshop.

This time they are waiting for us at the Orphanage. I have with me more tubes of colors, new painting tools and, of course, more glue for Sticky. He sees me from the distance and comes to the porch with a big smile. He is holding hands with a boy I had not noticed during my first visit. It is very cold early in the morning and the new boy is wearing an old brown jacket with a hood. "You look like Robin Hood!" Rainy says while guiding his hand on the paper to paint a flower full of dots.

Later in the day the boy is walking around with a funny hat balanced on his head. Definitely he is into hoods. We will name him Robin.

We paint more watercolors and create a new series of cards: the porch is really busy and the kids are very much at ease with us. Ken, Monk Xan Wan and Pong, the tuk-tuk driver are assisting the operations.

While I take photos, I realize that many boys are looking at my two digital cameras with interest. Perhaps I can start a new art project... why not. "Take the cameras, go around and shoot: each of you has five minutes. Then come back and we will do something else."

Most of the boys take funny pictures, some of them really beautiful. We all look at the images enlarged in the screen of my computer standing on an orange juice box.

We make all kinds of comments. There is a lot of laughing. It is pure joy watching their faces.









“Think different, take photos that nobody else would”. I tell everybody.
“Change your point of view...” and Rainy, Robin and myself lie down on the floor to make them jump on the table and shoot from there. The young photographers are already at work. They love to take portraits of the other children. Some of the images are really special.



Robin and Sticky: Robin wears funny hats and Sticky loves to glue.

















On the top of a box of orange juice is my computer, Artù. We are reviewing the photos taken by the children.



We love the images of the shoes, the photo of the four legs and the close up portraits. Lots of happiness around.



Rainy, Monk Xan Wan, Ken (Monk for one year) and Arianna



Ciao, we will be back to see you, all of you, very soon.



Io ho quel che ho donato
I have what I gave

Gabriele D'Annunzio



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THE RAJA PROJECT

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www.ariannacaroli.com
ariannacaroli@earthlink.net

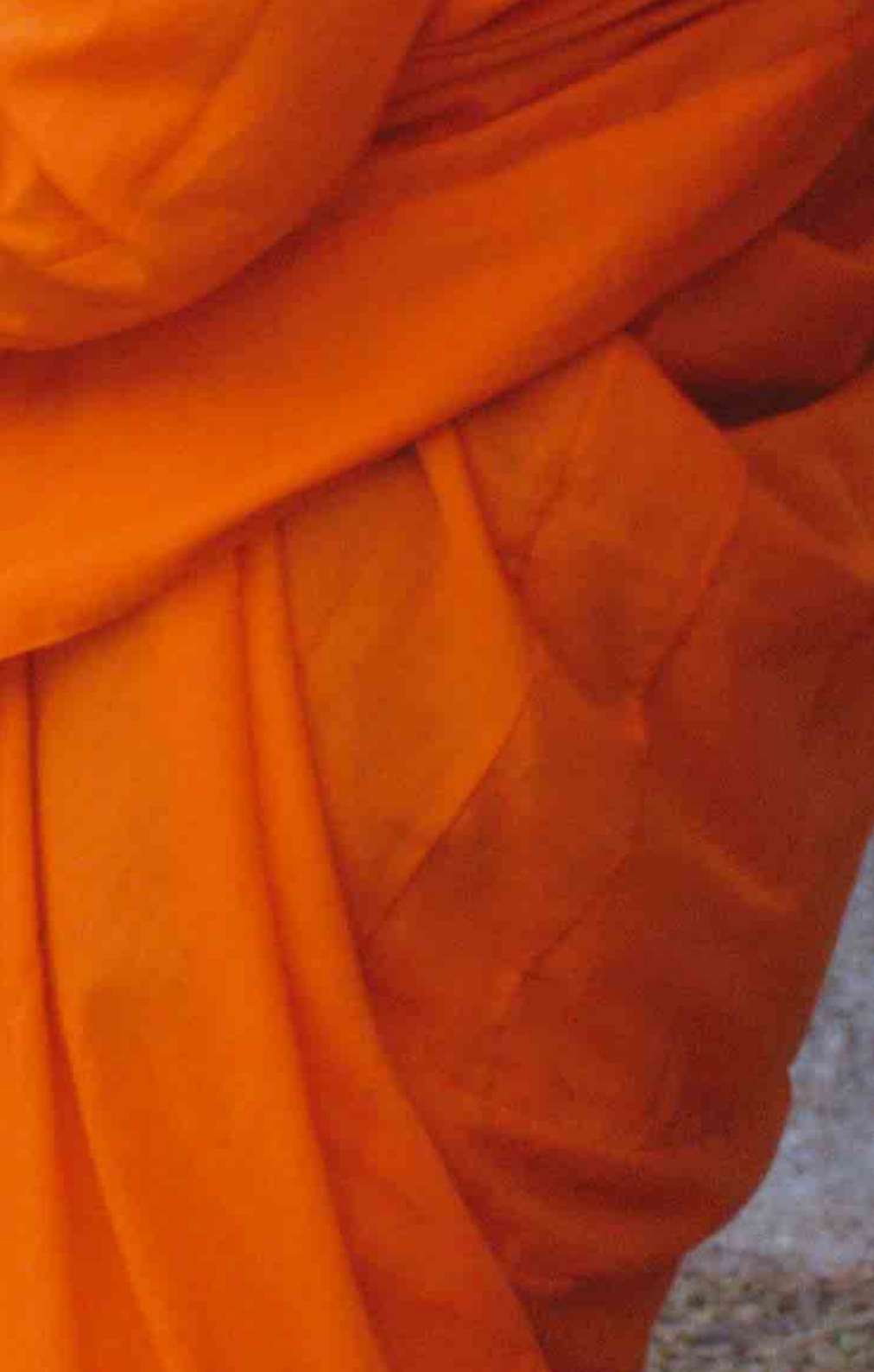
Italian by birth (Orvieto), Arianna holds a doctorate in Ancient Literature and Archeology from the University of Rome. She has always been fascinated by the Spirit and the Art of the East, attracted by its elegance, exoticism, sensuality and mystical content. Long sojourns in Bali, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Cambodia and India, along with periods in Europe and in the United States, have made Arianna truly a citizen of the world. Her paintings combine eastern mysticism with western expressive power. Studying Russian icon writing, Arianna discovered how gold can make a painting at the same time sumptuous and transcendent, two qualities that characterize her work.

Richard Porter Ph.D.

Arianna Caroli







**Do not make your tomorrow
Predictable.
Expect nothing and
be ready for
everything.
That's living dangerously.
Risk
is the only guarantee
to be
truly alive.**

OSHO

ArianaCavoli

THE RAJA PROJECT