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Know our island. Know our history. Click to know! — Volume V, Issue III.

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Biba Mes CHamoru!



(1) Dancers of Inetnon Gef Pa'go/ Courtesy of Inetnon Gef Pa'go. (2) CHamoru man mending a net/ Courtesy of MARC. (3.) Setting up a fiesta table/ Courtesy of Nathalie Pereda.

Here in Guahån, this month is an important time to celebrate and honor the cultural practices that make us who we are, and think about how we can pass them down to future generations. What makes our culture and island communities unique? How can we protect these ways of life, and learn from how our people have adapted and carried on throughout times of hardship and change? CHamoru/Chamorro culture is rooted in values of reciprocity, humility, and ways to practice care for our community.

There are many examples of how we can see these values play out in our daily life - think about the last time that you left a fiesta or even a friend's house for dinner. You most likely were given a plate of food to eat for later or bring back to your family. The CHamoru cultural value [geftao](#), which means "giving" or

"generous", guides the ways that we interact with each other in our community.

This value ensures that everyone in the community is cared for and is closely tied with practices of humility and reciprocity. In offices in Guahån and throughout the Northern Marianas, it's common for people to bring in *empanadas*, local bananas, or other foods to share with each other. If you take some of the food from that day, you'll probably want to express your gratitude by bringing in food or other goods to share with everyone another day. This is a kind of unspoken cultural protocol, or set of customs, which encourages connection and generosity within our community.

CHamoru are also known for our skills as hosts and our ability to make everyone feel welcome. When hosts offer

food or favors to guests, it's considered polite for guests to initially refuse the offer. A guest can refuse once or twice, but then accept the offer when it's made for the third time! If you don't accept, the host may be hurt or offended. This is another example of how CHamoru practice the value of *geftao*, and the unspoken protocols around our interactions. How do you practice being *geftao*, or what are some ways that you see this value being practiced in your family? What can you teach young people in your life, or your own descendants, about this value?

The cultural value of [inafa'maolek](#) literally translates into English as 'to make' (*inafa*) 'good' (*maolek*). Within our interconnected island...

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...communities, cooperation and concern for the collective over the individual is necessary for everyone's wellbeing. We can imagine how practicing *inafa'maolek*, or working to ensure harmony between community members, was essential in ancient CHamoru society, and we can see many examples of how the ethics and spirit of *inafa'maolek* carries into our lives today. For example, *inafa'maolek* guides the practice of *chenchule'* - a system of social reciprocity and support.

At funerals, CHamoru gather to grieve, remember the life of a loved one, and also to offer *ika* to the family of the deceased. Funeral go-ers, representing their families and villages, leave envelopes of money to help support the grieving family. It is understood that this will be reciprocated at some point in the future, and that the practice of *inafa'maolek* means that the cycle of community care will continue. *CHenchule'* also extends beyond monetary assistance - at *fiestas* and other celebrations, CHamoru regularly

come together and contribute to the event through labor, food, and drink. At *fiestas*, you'll also see people staying afterwards to help clean up and to make sure that everyone attending leaves with some of the food to eat later. These are just a few examples of the values that guide our way of life. What are some others that you can think of? Be sure to [visit Guampedia](#) to learn more, and take some time this Mes CHamoru to celebrate the values that have been passed down to us over time!

Historical Highlights

Trade between CHamorus and Europeans

Illustration by Theodor de Bry depicting trade between CHamorus and Europeans/ Courtesy of the Guam Public Library



Members of the [matao](#), the highest-ranking strata of Mariana Islands society in the 16th and 17th centuries, carried on the first sustained cultural interaction and commercial exchange between Pacific Islanders and Europeans. From [Ferdinand Magellan's](#) 1521 visit through the establishment of the 1668 Spanish Jesuit mission, these island traders, primarily from Guam and Rota, regularly bartered food staples and craftwork for iron goods with Spanish exploration and trade vessels, Dutch expeditions and English privateers. The Mariana Islands was the [major maritime crossroads](#) of the Pacific Ocean during this period.

Guam Congress Walkout

On March 5, 1949, the 9th Guam Congress [walked out](#) as a protest against the US Naval Government and to underscore its quest for a measure of self-government and US citizenship. This action was the climax of half a century of discontent among many CHamorus on Guam. As soon as the Guam Congress voted on the walkout, [Assemblyman Carlos Taitano](#) rushed to report to his press contacts in Honolulu by telegram. The wire services quickly filed the news, and the New York Times reported "Guam Assembly Quits" on March 6 and "Congress Walkout" on March 7.

Pownall called for a special joint session of the Congress for March 12, but the Congress members met the day before and decided not to attend. [Naval Governor Charles Pownall](#) then dismissed the members of the Guam Congress and announced that he would appoint their replacements. This announcement was immediately met by hostile public reaction, and meetings in twelve villages declared that the people would not recognize any of the appointees.



Members of the 9th Guam Congress' House of Council/ Courtesy of the Sanchez Collection

Cultural Artist Profile

Ben “Sinahi” San Nicolas del Rosario



In the most widely accepted definitions of the word, art is anything purposely created that is meant to express and evoke emotions, feelings and ideas. Like other aspects of culture, art is influenced by the shared ideas and practices of a society. In other words, people create and respond to art based on meanings and ideas they learned in their culture.

[Ben “Sinahi” San Nicolas del Rosario](#) is a CHamoru [cultural artist](#) who specializes in creating traditional CHamoru ornamental pieces and jewelry. Among Guam’s visual artists, del Rosario has become known as one of the best creators of the *sinahi*, meaning “new moon,” a replica of an ancient artifact made of giant clam shell. He has consistently exhibited exceptional skill in shaping, polishing, and then drilling through each end of this

dense, brittle material without breaking or chipping it in the process.

Del Rosario was one of the pioneers of re-creating this CHamoru valuable, beginning with the renaissance of CHamoru traditional cultural expression through the visual arts in the early 1990s. He earned the name “Sinahi” through his efforts and continues to explore the icons and materials used by his ancestors, producing exquisitely-designed body ornamentation. His mediums include *Tridacna gigas* (giant clam) shell, *Spondylus* (oyster) shell, bone, wood and local fibers such as wild hibiscus bark.

Click here to watch a [Guampedia Production vignette](#) of del Rosario discussing the importance of culture in his art.



These, along with more of del Rosario’s pieces, will soon be available on Guampedia’s online heritage giftshop. In the meantime, click here to explore our current collection of [body ornamentation pieces!](#)

Pre-order Latte in the Marianas

Guampedia will be publishing the Latte in the Marianas book next month, offering a pre-order sale promotion up until March 12, 2022 (CHST)!

Visit Guampedia’s [online heritage gift shop](#) to pre-order the Latte in the Marianas and save \$15. Shipping will be an additional cost for off-island orders.

