

Atenas Today Interviews Mercedes Solano
local artist

Mercedes Solano is the woman who is single-handedly changing the face of the rocks leading to and from the Garita Bridge. She is an incredibly energetic and vivacious personality who took time out from her busy day to answer our questions:

AT: Mercedes, how long had you been planning on painting the rocks?

MS: The idea came to me about two years ago. I talked about it with a few people and one day (on my birthday, actually) I was energized. I packed up my equipment and my son and I headed out to check out the site. That was in February.

AT: Did you have any sponsors?

MS: At first, I began all alone, donating my time and materials. Then I approached the Chamber of Tourism (CATUCA) and they donated 30,000 colones towards materials and are very supportive of the project.

AT: What motivated you in the first place?

MS: I felt that the rocks looked very sad, that the whole area could be a face-lift and that people coming and going all day deserved to feast their eyes on something beautiful. I felt it was a quality of life improvement.

AT: Well, Mercedes, you certainly have improved our landscape! Tell us, have you encountered any problems?

MS: In the beginning, two of the rocks were stolen and another three were marred with some red paint. I contacted Channel 11 (Informe 11) and they sent a reporter who brought attention to the project and to the fact that neighbors believed they knew who was vandalizing. This has deterred other acts of vandalism, for which I am very grateful.

AT: How do you decide which rocks to paint?

MS: I try to look for big ones, and smooth ones are best. But I will try to give the others a try too.

AT: What about the themes you paint, how do you choose them?

MS: I usually bring samples of my own previous work but I am often inspired by just contemplating the 'canvas' which will always suggest a scene to me.

AT: What kind of reaction are you getting from the public?

MS: The public has been incredibly enthusiastic, often stopping and chatting with me as I am working. In addition, I have been contacted and asked to paint murals and rocks in other places. This makes me very happy because I feel the recognition that I didn't have before.

AT: When do you paint these rocks?

MS: I usually start at 5 a.m. and stop at 10:30 a.m. because the sun is too strong later. I Can be found on Sundays but not the next two Sundays because I am going on a road trip.

AT: Mercedes, do you offer classes?

MS: Yes, I paint and I also teach and receive lessons constantly. In addition to that, I participate in an artist's cooperative and we sell our things at different fairs during the year.

AT: Do you speak English?

MS: I am afraid not but it is something that I would like to learn in the future. It is something I consider important because now I can only communicate with English speaking customers in sign language!

AT: Do you have a studio?

MS: Yes, it is called "Galeria Nicholson" and it is located in the Rio Grande area....from The cruce (Y), 1 km east on the main road to San Jose. My phone is 446-5754 or Cellular 834-1675.

AT: Why is your studio called Galeria Nicholson?

MS: Years ago, I read a book and it mentioned an artist by the name of Nicholson who Was kind of unknown. I was inspired by that.

AT: Well, Mercedes, thank you so much for your time. We hope that you will get more sponsors so that you can continue to beautify the country and inspire others to share their own creativity.

MS: Thank you very much.

Interviewer's note: Mercedes is reaching out for donations. If you are interested in helping her, please contact her.