



## artistic environmentalism

Through films and circus arts, a yogini inspires eco-activism.

Rana Lee Araneta has long been an energetic performer. She was the first female mascot at Syracuse University in 1991, a job that entailed dressing up like an orange (yes, the fruit) and pumping people up. She brought that dynamism to her next calling—being an environmentally active yogi. In 2002 Araneta, who is certified as an Integral Yoga teacher, cofounded the Green Circus, a nonprofit that performs circus shows about renewable energy for kids in New York. Araneta went on to create afterschool “superhero” workshops in San Francisco to teach conservation to schoolchildren. She used yoga and meditation to empower the children to feel like “environmental superheroes,” charged with protecting the planet’s future. Along the way, Araneta figured out that entertainment and education go hand in hand. And she’s seen firsthand how asanas and meditation during circus shows and superhero workshops can spur action.

PEOPLE

“After holding a mudra, kids feel empowered and say, ‘I can do something cool,’” says Araneta. Once kids feel self-confident, she says, they are much more receptive to information, inspiring them to come up with ideas for making a difference. “Environmentalism starts with you—the environment of your body. When you feel good, then you want everyone in the world to feel good.” ➤

PHOTO: LAGHLAN SCOTLAND

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➤ Although Araneta wasn't feeling very well after knee surgery last year, she still found opportunities to share her eco-message. Cheri Sugal, the director of Rainforest2Reef, a nonprofit conservation group, approached her to direct a documentary about the Selva Maya rainforest in Mexico. Araneta didn't speak Spanish, and she had never called the shots as a director. But she drew upon her yoga practice to get through. "I kept visualizing that the trees and the children would make this movie," she says. "Every time I'd work I'd close my eyes, roll my shoulders, and breathe like I do in yoga until I felt relaxed."

The result is *Guardians of the Selva Maya*, a film about Rainforest2Reef's conservation work. In it, the village's children urge viewers to stop burning forests and contaminating water, just as Araneta visualized (visit [rainforest2reef.org/video.html](http://rainforest2reef.org/video.html)). Araneta has continued her eco-activism. She spoke at the 2007 Green Yoga Conference in Watsonville, California. After a trip to India to study Vedic hatha yoga, she went to London to develop yoga workshops and shoot a documentary about the global DJ dance culture. She asks the DJs to describe nature in three words. One reply: "Trash, green, peaceful."

RONNA ABRAMSON



## eco-startup

Two yogis put together all you need to take the first steps toward a greener life.

The two women who are behind the company Rocklovepeace, Melanie Monroe and Del Harley, are musicians who met in Nashville, Tennessee, 10 years ago. They found they

were kindred spirits and decided to perform and record together.

Their professional relationship took a turn for the environmental about a year ago, after Harley had an apocalyptic dream with

### GREEN LIVING

this message: "If you only knew, what would you

do?" She wasn't sure what it meant, but she sensed an impetus for change in her life. She emailed Monroe; the two started working on a plan to inspire others to make changes that would benefit the planet.

The outcome is Change: A Starter Kit. It contains a number of items, each with its own instructions. There's an energy-saving compact fluorescent bulb in a box that urges you to "switch"; a tree-free journal made from lokta-bush bark that suggests you "write"; a tree sapling you can "plant"; "be grateful" gratitude cards; fair trade

cocoa mix that reminds you to "be fair"; a sudoku booklet encouraging you to "think"; an envelope motivating you to "give" to end hunger; and a stylish tote fashioned from recycled materials that says "reuse." Tags are embedded with flower seeds you can plant. The bag, string, and ribbon are biodegradable. A portion of the proceeds goes to the organization Action Against Hunger.

The duo's yoga has been an inspiration. Harley practices yoga on the beach, and Monroe is a devotee of Anusara Yoga. "Ahimsa [the practice of nonviolence] is definitely a part of this. I really want to leave the planet better for the babe that I just brought into the world," says Monroe. "Yoga has really helped open my eyes to the fact that the world is so much bigger than just myself." Harley says that the evolution of the kit taught her a lot. "When Mel brought up fair trade, I was like, 'How did I not know about that?' It's true that once you see, you can't unsee. I'm learning and choosing differently, and that's the goal with the kit." DIANE ANDERSON