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Building Hype: Interview with an Arts Marketing and Communications Professional Gina Cariño



Mia Cariño, 37, lives in Los Angeles and works at a nonprofit arts organization called the Skirball Cultural Center.

GC: What's going on in the picture?

MC: That's me admiring a bust of Albert Einstein, taken when the Skirball mounted a landmark exhibition celebrating the life and career of the famed scientist. It was presented in 2005, the 100th anniversary of Einstein's famous $E=mc^2$, which revolutionized our modern understanding of space and time.

GC: Why Einstein, and why at the Skirball?

MC: The exhibition perfectly suited the Skirball's mission to explore the intersections between Jewish heritage and American democratic life. Einstein, a Jew, is widely recognized as perhaps the greatest physicist of the 20th century; few realize that he was also deeply committed to equality and justice, speaking out against the rise of fascism in Europe and supporting the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In a similar way, the exhibition currently at the Skirball, "Bob Dylan's American Journey, 1956-1966," illuminates the legacy of Bob Dylan not only as the artistic innovator who electrified contemporary songwriting but also as a compelling voice of social conscience.

GC: So the Skirball is a Jewish organization that mounts shows on accomplished Jews?

MC: Not exclusively, though it'd be fun to work on a show about Woody Allen! No, the Skirball addresses a range of topics in its exhibitions as well as in its performing-arts, literary, film, adult-education, and

family programs. A sample month of offerings might be an exhibition of photographs of sacred spaces in L.A., the premiere of a small British theater company, a jewelry-making class, a concert by a Malian blues guitarist, a talk by Isabel Allende or Wes Craven, and a tie-dye workshop for kids.

GC: How is that "Jewish" exactly?

MC: Our founding president often explains it like this: just as Abraham's first act as a Jew was to welcome the stranger, the Skirball's adherence to core Jewish values mandates bringing people together and encouraging dialogue. So, while what we offer is eclectic in genre, genesis, execution, even taste, all of the content celebrates the arts as a means for making connections across cultures.

GC: And what is it that you do at the Skirball?

MC: I am Communications Director, responsible for building media hype for the Skirball—cultivating relationships with journalists, placing stories, training spokespeople, etc. I also manage the institution's overall editorial style, shaping the language we use to describe our content and draw audience.

GC: Have you ever gotten hype for the Skirball here in Spain?

MC: Well, I recently received an inquiry from the newspaper *Que!*. Apparently they're interested in our exhibition about Bob Dylan, who I hear will be singing at the Zaragoza Expo.

GC: Were you always in public relations?

MC: My career began in book publishing, first in editorial, then in marketing. When I moved to L.A., which is not a publishing capital, I worked first as an art-book publicist, then ventured into publicity for visual and performing arts.

GC: Any difference between arts marketing and other kinds of marketing besides the obvious?

MC: Well, in arts marketing, you can always feel proud of your product. Can't imagine that's true in all industries!

GC: Is a degree in arts administration necessary for your job?

MC: I majored in literature, with an emphasis on American women writers—Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange... so I guess not! Mostly, for my job (or I would argue, *any* job), one needs to be a strong writer.

GC: What's most fun in your job?

MC: Interacting with the artists and reeling in a journalist with a good story idea.

GC: Name an artist you would love to do PR for.

MC: David Hockney, because when I met him he was perfectly lovely and because his work is so great. Plus the little caps he wears make for good buzz.