

JUST BETWEEN US



FROM THE ARCHIVES OF ARLAN HUANG

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With an essay by Danielle Wu
and an interview between Howie Chen and Arlan Huang



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THINK!
CHINA
TOWN



To Lillian and Florinda

—**ARLAN HUANG**

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INTRODUCTION

BY DANIELLE WU



Postcard from Sol LeWitt wishing Arlan Huang's son, Ray Wing-Yun Huang, a happy birthday, August 16, 1981.



An origami heart by Hozuki Nomoto, 2015.

For nearly six decades as a practicing artist, Arlan Huang has quietly collected art. These include small tokens of appreciation given by customers of his New York frame shop, Squid Frames. Playful doodles and correspondence from blue chip artists whose artworks go for thousands to wealthy collectors.

An origami heart given to him by the child of an artist he met during a residency in Japan. In his eyes, all creations done in earnest should be equally treasured as "art." Museum-worthy paintings enjoy the same level of praise he affords the little paper heart folded by Hozuki Nomoto.

The market would evaluate his art collection differently. After setting up shop with his business partner Karl Matsuda, first on NoHo's Great Jones Street in 1974 and on Bleeker Street the following year, Arlan recalled struggling to make ends meet and shivering inside a building that did not properly heat in the winter. One day at 163 Bleeker Street, one of his first major customers who later exchanged artwork with Arlan was American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt. "We had absolutely no business. It was freezing, we wore down coats, and this guy with a snow cap and a fatigue jacket came up the stairs," recalled Arlan. "He ordered 100 frames, and that was the beginning of our business."¹ Other artists who have traded artwork with Huang and still rely on Squid Frames include Dread Scott, KAWS, and Howardena Pindell. The central narrative that drives Arlan's collection is not market speculation but serendipitous encounters with artists—some rising stars by lucky coincidence—that bloomed into lasting relationships over time, buttressed by a consistent framing job.

¹ Arlan Huang. Interview. Conducted by Danielle Wu, August 29, 2022.



Photograph of Fay Chew, Lillian Ling, Arlan Huang, and Karl Matsuda at Squid Frames, 163 Bleeker Street, 1979.



Karl Matsuda at Squid Frames, 270 Bowery Street, 1983. Photograph by Henry Chu.

And although Arlan has, at times, purchased his colleagues' artwork, a majority of the photographs, paintings, and memorabilia now in his possession were amassed through "art swaps," or friendly exchanges between fellow artists in the spirit of camaraderie that operate outside the conventional economy of transaction. During drop-offs and visits to Arlan's artist studio, a separate room inside Squid Frames, artists would also stop to chat, share advice, or just experience the comfort of each other's company.

I first met Arlan during one such visit with one of Squid Frame's regulars, the artist Naomi Kawanishi Reis. What immediately struck me was his lack of hustle and his desire to talk about anything but the task at hand. Having become accustomed to the impatient tempo of the city, it surprised me that Arlan did not want to rush. I wanted to know how we should pay; Arlan wanted to know about my childhood.

It was during this visit that I learned about his collection. I cannot feign to have as an egalitarian eye as Arlan's. I was starstruck by names

I recognized from history books and museum labels, charmed by his collection of work by his children, Ray and Joey, from when they were young. Intrigued but naive as an aspiring curator and critic, I then offered to trade one of my own paintings for Arlan's. Even Naomi, who joined our swap as a widely exhibited artist, expressed humility at offering her own. Perhaps this self-effacement was a condition of being Asian American women, reluctant to take up too much space lest it be misconstrued as egotistical. It was a familiar feeling. For years, I painted only as a reprieve from the humdrum of New York, refusing to take it seriously and exclusively sloughing off paintings as gifts to friends. All the same, Arlan loved my amateur work just as much as Hozuki's origami; just as much as a historic Sol LeWitt.

This indiscriminate wonder for all art and ephemera, as a kind of record keeping, makes the constellation of works owned by Arlan more of an archive than a traditional collection. Rather than illustrate his tastes, Arlan's archive memorializes a people. He keeps a rotating selection on view in his studio where

he makes his own paintings, which he says informs his practice in showing him what he can do or shy away from. For example, when his collection became abundant with realist artists, Arlan dropped his work sketching figures in favor of abstraction. For him, archiving has been equal parts a lifelong research project, an enchantment,² and a collaboration.

For these reasons, I suggested the colloquial phrase “just between us” to constitute the title for the first exhibition of works from his archive. As a clause often uttered to precede information that is “off the record,” it espouses the major principles that form the bedrock of Arlan’s collecting ethics: that art should circulate outside the nefarious concerns of the market, that it should not seek approval from heteropatriarchal white institutions, and that a secret language in

the form of gossip and complaint forges the most precious and intimate of friendships.³

Arlan has often described his archive as “more Asian American than it’s ever been” and wonders out loud why he feels that way.⁴ Perhaps the most obvious explanation is the abundant number of artworks by Asian American artists he has collected. He owns a silkscreen by the late Asian American artist Martin Wong (page 103) and a paper wall sculpture by Alex Paik (pages 128-129), the founder and director of Tiger Strikes Asteroid, a national network of artist-run galleries. One of the earliest works on view is a letter from his aunt (page 57), an artist herself, who encouraged him to pursue his art at a time when it was nearly unheard of for children of Chinese immigrants to receive support to enter such an unprofitable field. The paper is nearly translucent, its creases worn with age but still crisp thanks to Arlan’s careful storage all these years. His treatment of objects mirrors

his treatment of people that have filtered through his life, as if strongly bonded; and in a selfish way, I see it as a forecast of how I will be treated.



Fay Chew, Lydia Tom, Takashi Yanagida, and Lisa Abe at Basement Workshop, 1971. Photograph by Hoyt Soohoo.

research into Manhattan’s Chinatown community. It quickly became a central hub for Asian American political activists, artists, writers, musicians, and poets.



Basement Workshop members Charlie Chin, Nobuko Miyamoto, and Chris Iijima rehearsing at Folk City, New York, 1971. Photograph by Bob Hsiang.

Another significant early keepsake is *Yellow Pearl* (1972) (pages 62-69), an anthology of Asian American art and one of the first collaborative projects that Arlan helped lead as a member of the community organization Basement Workshop. Officially registered as a nonprofit in 1970, Basement Workshop was established by Danny Yung, Eleanor Yung, and a handful of other supporters to store and facilitate



Fay Chiang at Basement Workshop, 1973. Photograph by Henry Chu.

² I am inspired here by Marci Kwon’s study of an “enchantment” as it related to Joseph Cornell’s box constructions and other artworks: “an ephemeral experience that exceeds rational explanation.” For more, see Marci Kwon, *Enchantments: Joseph Cornell and American Modernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).

³ Here I am inspired by feminist analysis by Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Penguin, 2021) and Sarah Ahmed’s *Complaint!* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2021)

⁴ Arlan Huang. Interview. Conducted by Howie Chen, August 18, 2022.

In 1971, while still a BFA student at Pratt Institute, Arlan often skipped classes to attend meetings in a basement located at 54 Elizabeth Street that would frequently leak when it rained. Arlan's archival photographs by Basement Workshop members Henry Lau, Bob Hsiang, and Hoyt Soohoo capture a time that looked austere yet spirited. Fay Chew poses for the camera against a backdrop of exposed pipes and cardboard boxes (pages 48-49); Charlie Chin, Nobuko Miyamoto, and Chris Iijima huddle together with guitars to warm up for a performance (pages 44-45). Arlan also kept an early work by photographer Corky Lee, renowned for photographing union strikes and happenings in the neighborhood when few considered them worthy of documentation. Arlan recalled that the space had low ceilings, a few milk crates for seats, and a table repurposed from an old spool for

telephone wires. None of these minor inconveniences seemed to prevent members from forming lasting friendships; "camaraderie happens in any space," he said.⁵

It was also through Basement Workshop that Arlan formed a lifelong friendship with Japanese American artist and activist Tomie Arai, whose entry into the organization helped expand its interests beyond Chinese residents in Chinatown in favor of transnational solidarity. Among their many collaborations include a 1977 May Day protest pin (see also pages 80-81). He keeps it alongside other pins from significant community events, including one by Corky Lee from the first Chinatown Health Fair, where Arlan met his wife Lillian Ling.

⁵ Huang. Interview. Conducted by Danielle Wu, August 29, 2022.



Various button pins by Tomie Arai, Alex Chin, Arlan Huang, Corky Lee, and I Wor Kuen, ca. 1970s.

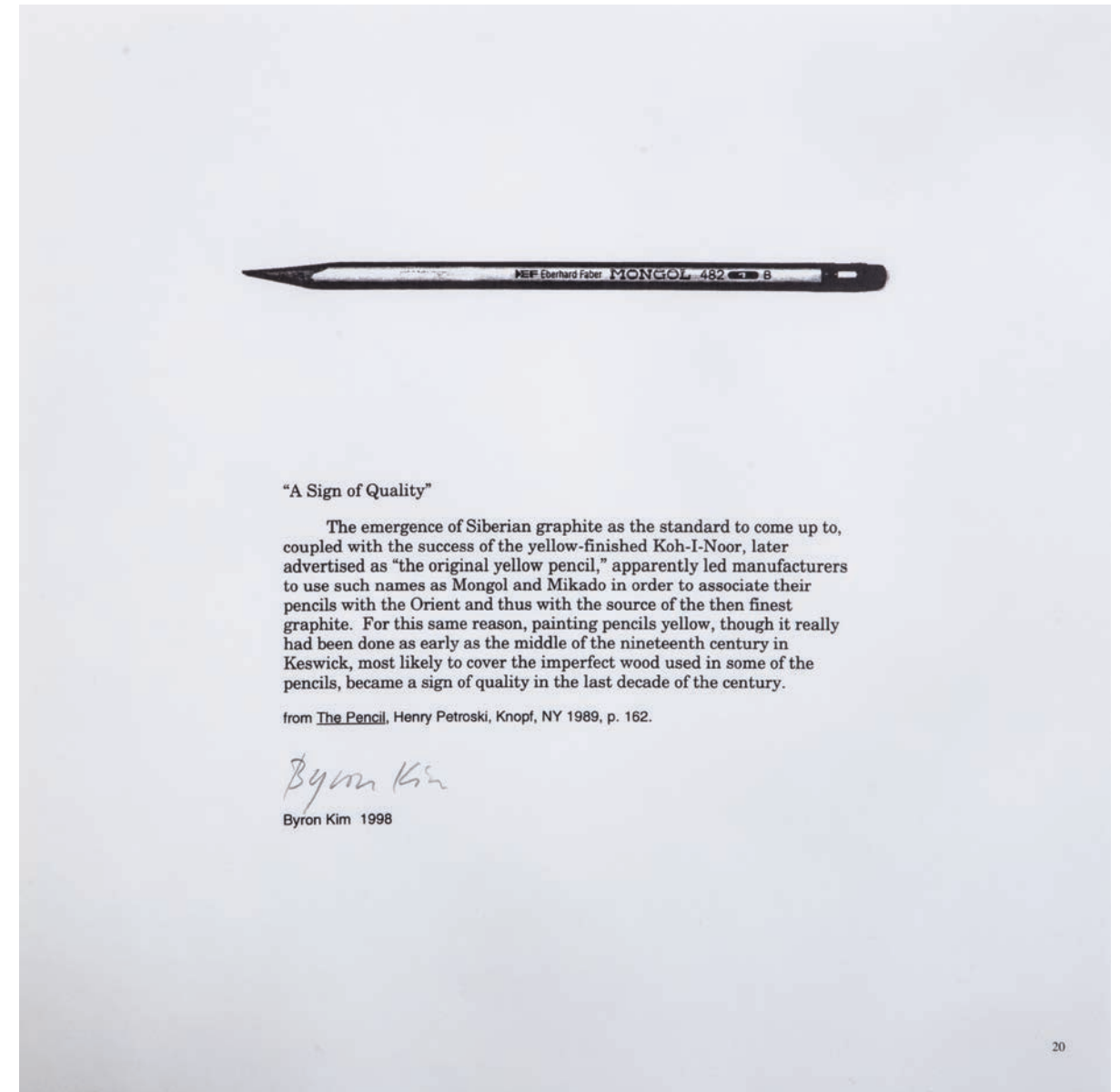
Artists from Basement Workshop like Arlan and Tomie would later become early members of Godzilla: Asian American Art Network. Begun in 1990 by the artists Ken Chu, Bing Lee, and Margo Machida, Godzilla was founded to support Asian American artists and later became known for decrying their lack of representation at the 1993 Whitney Biennial. Without waiting for the glamor of institutional recognition, Arlan began collecting his colleagues' work long before museums considered the mere existence of Asian American art. His collection includes former Godzilla members Ken Chu, Helen Oji, and Lynne Yamamoto.

However, Arlan did not carve a niche collection based on discriminatory constructs of racial biology nor did he limit his collection to the imperfect geography known as Asia. The Asian Americanness of his collection does not have much to do with the individual identity of the artists. Such thoughtless essentializing would

simply not hold in the wake of enduring ambivalence, if not downright cynicism, for the viability of Asian American group exhibitions and the hegemonies that the label "Asian American art" unintentionally produces.⁶ As the late curator and art critic Alice Yang wrote in a paper titled "Asian American Exhibitions Reconsidered": "Can the link between race and artistic practice be conceived beyond the logic of simple negation or illustration?"⁷ *Just Between Us* offers an opportunity to take a look at the practice of Asian American collecting as assembling a world repeatedly torn apart.

⁶ See a 1991 interview transcribed by Garage Chatterjee and edited by Augie Tam between Meena Alexander, Margo Machida, Paul Pfeiffer, Andrew Pekarik, and Renee Tajima. Augie Tam, ed., "Is There An Asian American Aesthetics?" in Howie Chen, *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network* (New York: Primary Information, 2021), 151–159.

⁷ Alice Yang, "Asian American Exhibitions Reconsidered," in *Why Asia? Contemporary Asian and Asian American Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 94–98.



Byron Kim's contribution to Godzilla: Asian American Art Network's anthology, *From Basement to Godzilla*, 1999.

What makes Arlan's archive atypical is his *method* of collecting and his disregard for how legible it is to those outside it. As José Esteban Muñoz argued, minoritarian work produces ephemera—such as the queer archive—that displaces the tyranny of identity.⁸ So perhaps the more succinct question to pose is: what is Asian American methodology?

To parse this out, it is worth mentioning what Asian American method *prevented* from happening around this time. Before *Just Between Us* became a serious project, it was conceptualized almost as a retaliation to the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA). In 2021, MoCA canceled what would have been a long-awaited, historic exhibition featuring work by Godzilla: Asian American Art Network. After local activists unearthed evidence that the Museum was negotiating with the city in order to receive concessions in exchange for staying silent on a new jail plan in Chinatown, Arlan

⁸ "Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere," from José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance*, 8:2, 5-16, DOI: 10.1080/07407709608571228.

and Tomie were among the first artists in the slated exhibition to write an open letter that criticized the move.⁹ In concert with local businesses such as Wing on Wo and prison abolitionists, their voices caused a domino effect among other Godzilla members who withdrew from the opportunity until the Museum agreed to hold a public forum and reject concession money.¹⁰ "To this day MoCA has remained silent and refuses to engage the community with an official public statement regarding their involvement with the 4 borough jail plan," Arlan wrote.¹¹

It is interesting that the Asian American business in this day and age has formed in opposition to the Asian American institution on the carceral state and the related issue of racial

⁹ I would like to thank Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB), co-founded by Tomie Arai, Betty Yu, and ManSee Kong, for bringing this to my attention. There are also countless other activists and organizers that should be thanked for bringing aspects of this issue to light, including but not limited to: #NoNewJails, Art Against Displacement (AAD), and Neighbors United Below Canal (NUBC).

¹⁰ Danielle Wu, "Godzilla, the Asian American Arts Network, Teaches Us That Critique Is Essential," *Artsy*, May 7, 2021. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-godzilla-asian-american-arts-network-teaches-critique-essential>

¹¹ Huang, "Working thoughts on The Museum of Chinese in America and Chinatown," *Neighbors United Below Canal*. September 1, 2020, revised October 21, 2020. <https://www.nubcnyc.com/community-letters>

capitalism. On one hand, storefronts like Wing on Wo have become more agile, more fastened to the interests of its embedded neighborhood. On the other hand, commercial interests often encroach on public funding for social commons like the art museum. The culminated rift in this case presents many important questions that have no easy resolution. What kind of space can ultimately hold Asian American things while simultaneously embodying all its utopian politics? Who can ultimately be trusted as custodians of the Asian American story? In 2006, scholar Susette Min wondered similarly in her essay for *One Way Or Another: Asian American Art Now*: "We need to think about a different framework or perhaps a place outside the exhibition and institutional space as we know it."¹²

Squid Frames, an Asian American business, opened its doors without meaning to do anything other than pay rent while the founders attended protests and made work at Basement

¹² Susette S. Min, "The Last Asian American Exhibition in the Whole Entire World," in *One Way Or Another: Asian American Art Now*, ed. Melissa Chiu, Karen Higa, and Susette Min (New York: The Asia Society Museum, 2006).

Workshop. "We made \$60 a week for a long time. Squid was like the hub of our being. We did everything there," recalled Arlan.¹³ Even the name came as a collaborative afterthought, according to Arlan. Karl's girlfriend Lulu arbitrarily suggested "squid" one evening, and that was it. Arlan described its survival up until today as somewhat of a fluke; without any marketing or business strategy, Squid Frames has become a haven of sorts. When given an option of exhibition space to show his archive, Arlan only ever considered Pearl River Mart. As a decades-long fixture of Chinatown, it was an antithesis to an art world defined by the Western white cube and symbolic of his decision to no longer be part of it.

One cannot understand the Asian American exhibition—that is to say, curatorial method and display—without first considering the exhibition of Asian American persons. In 1834, Afong Moy was the first documented Asian woman in the United States and toured the country as "The Chinese Lady." As scholar Anne

¹³ Huang. Interview. Conducted by Howie Chen, August 18, 2022.

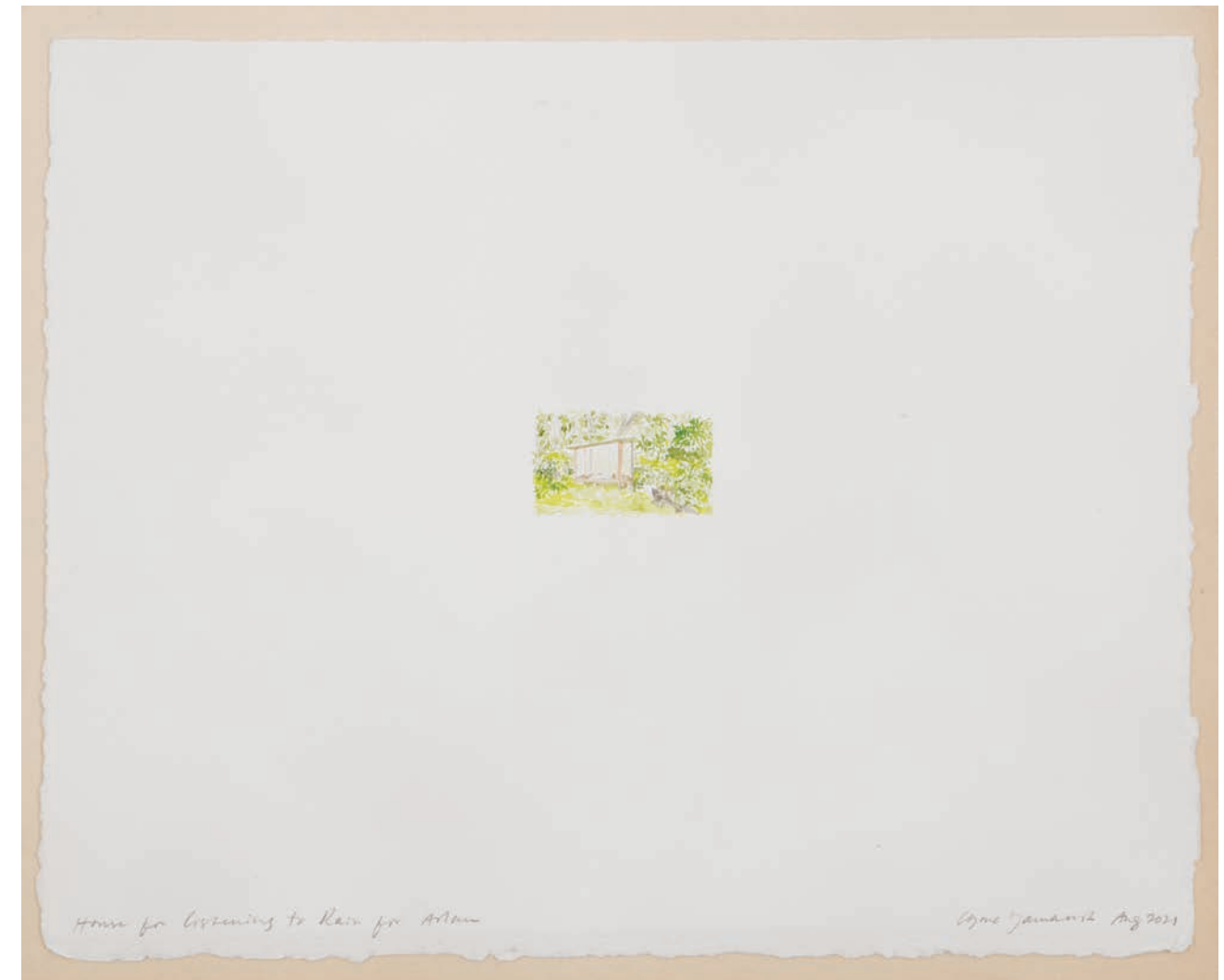
Anlin Cheng contends of historical figures like Moy, “yellow” Asiatic identity is feminine and excessive, inextricable from commodity, possession, and ornament; and yet more than just an injury, Asiatic thingliness also opens up welcome alternatives to humanity as envisioned by Western Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁴ It goes without saying that the position of being Othered can result in exclusion, antagonism, humiliation, and general melancholic despondency. But as artists like Arlan have shown, there is perhaps also nothing inherently wrong with being Other or object. In the case of Basement Workshop, community was found while essentially gathering in the subterranean. What results is what scholar Sianne Ngai might have called “Ugly Feelings” or minoritized in-between emotions while being Other: catharsis, righteousness, solitude. The writer Andrea Long Chu recently yearned for acknowledgement of the like: “Race, once people start living with it, can no longer be reduced to that violence for the staggeringly simple reason that people *do* live with it, every day, gradually patching together

¹⁴ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

new, often temporary worlds of experience in which race may be felt as something other than a target on one’s back.”¹⁵ When I look at Arlan’s collection, I feel a strange sense of satisfaction at its narrow audience, knowledge that might cause some to mourn as unpopular or unquantifiable. As a result of refusing bureaucratic order or predatory interests, it can be unfiltered, uncorrupted, and ultimately tell a story that feels true.

For me, among Arlan’s most compelling works is the most easily overlooked because of its quiet, yet warm minimalism: Lynne Yamamoto’s *House for Listening to Rain for Arlan* (2021). The house that Lynne has conceptually built for Arlan barely takes up an inch on a great expanse of white paper, as if hesitating to take up any room at all. Instead, it invites us to wander into the untouched margins, filling it with our individuated preferences: the volume of rain, the moisture level hovering in the air, the soddenness of ground beneath our

¹⁵ Andrew Long Chu, “The Mixed Metaphor Why does the half-Asian, half-white protagonist make us so anxious?” *Vulture*, September 27, 2009, <https://www.vulture.com/2022/09/the-mixed-asian-metaphor.html>



Lynne Yamamoto, *House for Listening to Rain for Arlan*, 2021.

feet. Its title mirrors my own *Arlan's Oranges* (2020) (pages 138-139). Between a sanctuary and oranges for Arlan, made independently and unbeknownst to each other, both evince wishes for our friends to simply feel at home and well fed. Two simple wishes that, in today's repressive world, grow ever more complicated to ethically attain. I dare to claim this sensibility as Asian American, one that I have observed typical of the yellow woman specifically: an anticipation that we need to make room for others.

Like Yamamoto's work, Arlan's archive makes space for "Asian America" as one of constant flux and open contention, particularly among Asian Americans ourselves. It is unified by neither aesthetics nor politics. It is limited in scope and scale, tethered to place and time, fallible to memory, and feels woefully incomplete. Yet, this small sliver of an archive tells the story of how an entrusted space for Asian American ideas, culture, and art might not have been a museum or an art gallery, but rather shepherded between people.



Arlan Huang and Karl Matsuda at Squid Frames, 270 Bowery Street, 1983. Photograph by Henry Chu.

ARLAN HUANG

IN CONVERSATION WITH

HOWIE CHEN



CHINATOWN

HOWIE: I would like to get a feel of your trajectory with art and your concept of community as you moved through different places in the U.S. over the years. First, where did you grow up?

ARLAN: I've always felt I traveled two paths. A community art path and the dominant art world path—you know the "I am the great Picasso" highway. Because my family was rooted in contributing to the community, I could never really be comfortable in the white club even though I received much encouragement to pursue the arts. As I became more politically aware of the contradictions it became clear, but with ambition and youth you can ram through the contradictions.

My family lived over the hill from Chinatown but all our activities revolved around Chinatown. My neighborhood for the first 12 years was pretty much second- and third-generation Chinese American. Although, I remember my first good friend on my block was a white kid named George Moon.

If I encountered overt racism I don't remember it as such. I wasn't aware. Somehow it was ingrained in me as being Other. I identified myself as Chinese and all the white people were Americans. As a kid, it didn't bother me at all.

HOWIE: How did family form your sense of community and place in American society?

ARLAN: I grew up in a household with deep community ties including the Chinese YMCA and the First Congregational Church where my mother and family were devoted to since childhood. My mother and her lifelong friends thrived in this insular environment but it also afforded them the confidence to spread their wings throughout the Bay Area. One of my uncles was a bombardier on B-17s in WWII. Miraculously he flew the required 25 missions.

I think the contradiction of surviving 25 while bombing Germany turned him to God. He became a minister. My grandmother was a founder of the Chinese YWCA in 1930. It now houses The Chinese Historical Society of San Francisco.

HOWIE: When did you come into a political consciousness that brought a new perspective to this formative experience?

ARLAN: It's a slow process, and it continues. There were many factors that brought me into political and racial consciousness. I think each level of education brought wider exposure to the realities of your station in life. And then there are these bursts of enlightenment. I became fascinated with Mario Savio and the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley in 1964. A few years later one of my uncles returned from Mississippi. He was volunteering with a Quaker group doing voter registration. He told of marches, sit-ins and horrific stories of white brutality. There is no deadline in finding your Asian American soul.

HOWIE: How did art enter your life?

ARLAN: San Francisco had two newspapers, the Examiner and the Chronicle. Both had an art contest for kids. The winner would be printed each Friday. I entered when I was six or seven and knew I would win. After years of receiving honorable mentions I gave up. One day I happened to look and saw my painting and my name. I won. I found out my mother had continued sending artworks without my knowing. My mom is my inspiration.

HOWIE: And it endures.

ARLAN: Her childhood friend was Auntie Edith. We called her by her Chinese name, Aw Ying Goo. She was an art teacher and always encouraged me to do art. Every Christmas she would gift me art stuff like these little pocket books on Matisse, Monet. So the European art thing started early.

HOWIE: It sounds like you had a lot of loving support and a positive relationship to art through your family.

ARLAN: As I got older I started to do more community art. I belonged to a club at the YMCA

and anytime art things and posters needed to be done. I was the guy. Somehow, I learned how to do silkscreen.

In 1963, I attended a summer painting class at the San Francisco Art Institute. I was a senior in high school. I fell in love with the smell of linseed oil and paint. In the studio was this huge wall painting that struck me in awe. Later, I discovered the artist was Diego Rivera.

HOWIE: That famous mural there that is now in danger because of SFAI's financial collapse.

ARLAN: Yeah, and Joan Brown was the teacher. I remember she introduced her friend to the class. That was Bernice Bing. The last memory was I was smitten by her because she had the same hairstyle as my aunt. Whoa, another Chinese beatnik.

HOWIE: Speaking of beatniks, what was your relationship to the Asian community and the larger counter-cultural moment in San Francisco?

ARLAN: My high school years were mostly in

Chinatown. There were the Cameron House and YMCA clubs. A group of Chinatown OGs hung out at Leways Pool Hall that later turned into the Red Guards' headquarters. Being on a few high school athletic teams, we got to travel to other high schools in the city. I competed and met a good mix of Asian, Black, Latin, and white kids throughout the city.

I would also spend time in the coffee houses on upper Grant Ave. I became fascinated with this beatnik haven. And right before I left for New York I was checking out Haight Ashbury.

HOWIE: You left right as the hippie thing was kicking in.

ARLAN: Yeah, The Summer of Love was the summer I left. I remember going to a concert at the base of Telegraph Hill with hundreds of people dancing in a haze of weed. There was this great singer with a band called Big Brother and the Holding Company.

HOWIE: Was that scene—I guess the word didn't exist back then—inclusive? Did you feel like you belonged and you were with different

types of people intermingling in some revolutionary cultural and social moment?

ARLAN: Yeah, it was observing in the beginning. I was pretty much a Chinatown kid venturing into this crazy weed-smoking white world.

HOWIE: The '60s counter culture was a very white movement.

ARLAN: Yes, but everybody was cool. It's about flower power, Love, man, right? I felt included even though I still had my Chinatown hairdo. You share weed and everything is groovy, man.

HOWIE: Then you decided to go to college in the middle of all that?

ARLAN: Yes. City College. I just signed up for this art class, which turned out to be great. Half of the students were Asian. And City had an unbelievable huge Diego Rivera mural in the theatre building.

HOWIE: That's really cool. It's the opposite of my experience growing up in New Jersey

in the 1980s and 1990s. I did not grow up encountering many different types and generations of Asian Americans. It's a revelation to me that there were actually so many different pathways and ways of being in America, even during such a socially constrained time in the U.S.

By the late 1960s, with the counterculture, civil rights movement, and the onset of the Vietnam War, a kind of political critique of America began to take hold. How did that milieu affect you?

ARLAN: I slowly changed while my parents did not, so I thought. My father was on the conservative side. They didn't approve of some things. Among friends, the talk of self identity in the context with third world politics was a main topic because of the proximity of the San Francisco riots in 1968.

HOWIE: Was the connection between politics and art built into your worldview then? You mentioned the Diego Rivera mural as a social realist background in your art education. Did you make that connection?

ARLAN: I think it was there. But was not consciously in my grasp. It was like this vague cultural osmosis that soaked into my body that sort of revealed itself as intuition. I often act by intuition rather than through understanding.

HOWIE: What were the early instances of your political activation?

ARLAN: The assassinations were huge teaching moments. JFK, RFK, then Malcolm X. And I knew of him because I was a devoted fan of Muhammad Ali. And for Martin Luther King, Jr., there was a massive outpouring for a rally at City College. I think each event politically radicalized me further into the civil rights and anti-war arena.

HOWIE: How did these headlines and political events change your relationship with art, if at all?

ARLAN: For me, it did not. Art was separate from political rhetoric. The Black Panthers were making headlines, and I totally agreed with their program. Their newsletters contained very dynamic graphics. There was a growing

consciousness of Marxism, Communism, and China. At SF State, when you are confronted by a line of California Highway Patrolmen with shields and clubs you run. But you begin to understand the power of the police state.

That was the beginning of Asian American studies at San Francisco State University. The growth of ethnic studies taught me the urgency to reclaim your history. I began to follow what the Panthers and the Third World movement were doing. In the summer when all this started kicking in, I was committed to art school in New York. I left.



NEW YORK

HOWIE: Why?

ARLAN: Because I had applied to art schools during the previous years. I had already finished city college.

HOWIE: What was New York like then?

ARLAN: In fact, art school was secondary. The main reason for coming to New York was to get to know my grandparents better. They lived in Chinatown. I was sort of a special grandchild and I really didn't know why.

HOWIE: A mystery interesting! Where did you go to school?

ARLAN: Pratt Institute.

HOWIE: How did you get a grounding of what's going on when you arrived in New York City?

ARLAN: I landed during the summer of Woodstock. Between the Hippies in school and my grandparents in Chinatown, it seemed strangely familiar.

HOWIE: In my research, I talked to many Godzilla: Asian Art Network members. They often described landing in New York as feeling like being in a vacuum of cultural invisibility and a lack of community. Did you have that experience?

ARLAN: Not really, our family visited New York

in 1957, '59, and '63. So I was familiar with the city. 1957?? How old am I? I'm a curious and open type of guy but I gravitated towards the Asian kids at school. I met Alex Chin, an art major from Hong Kong. He had a dynamic personality and could draw and sing like crazy. He was connected to Chinatown—food, gangs, bands and people. He introduced me to Lillian Ling during the first Chinatown Health Fair 1971. I met Corky Lee while painting banners for the fair. Corky showed me the button he designed. Then came the Basement Workshop and Yellow Pearl. Lillian and I got married eight years later.

Then, of course, there was the anti-war march. I went to a march and of course what's the first thing I look for? The Asian Coalition.

HOWIE: Did it exist here?

ARLAN: Yes. And I saw that banner and joined the group. That was when I first met Chris Iijima, Joanne Miyamoto, and other political types of people at the time.

HOWIE: How did this political atmosphere relate to art for you?

ARLAN: They're interrelated, but I could not reconcile academic art and radical slogan art. Agitprop was not in my vocabulary yet. My level of political education didn't allow me to make those connections yet. In fact the art curriculum was becoming more alienating. There was no relevance in Eurocentric art history and the immediacy of carpet bombing in Vietnam.

HOWIE: Art education wasn't meshing with your experience of the world at the time.

ARLAN: A couple of the artist instructors were political, as they were also against the war and American imperialism. They participated in marches, but I felt there was a distinct difference between them and the Asian coalition politics. Then the school strikes blew up and everyone became politically radical overnight.

There was unity in the anti-war movement. I was being radicalized and needed more political education immediately.

HOWIE: The political function of art is very

heightened in Marxist discourse. It is often more intellectualized and not lived in the same way.

ARLAN: Yes. Not lived in the same way. Part of the Asian coalition was explicitly Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse Tung thought. I needed to catch up. The new read was *Seize The Time* by Bobby Seale, it tells the history of the Black Panthers.



BASEMENT WORKSHOP

HOWIE: Can you describe how that moment in which you got politically involved fed into your participation in the Basement Workshop?

ARLAN: Through the Asian Coalition I met Min Matsuda. We silkscreened the poster for the next March. She introduced me to AAA (Asian Americans For Action). They were mostly Nisei women of my mother's generation organizing anti-imperialism activities. The group included

Kazu Iijima (Chris's mother), Min Matsuda (Karl's mother), and Mary Kochiyama. After the Health Fair and a few marches, Chris, Nobuko, and Charlie held a concert at the Japanese Buddhist Church up on Riverside Drive and 105th St. in Manhattan.

There I met the church kids Alan Okada, Teddy Yoshikami, Nancy and Elsie Okada, Takashi Yanagida, and Larry Hama. After the concert Rocky Chin and Terry Dofu announced if anyone was interested in working on a project publishing the music and lyrics of Chris, Nobuko, and Charlie, there was going to be a meeting in Chinatown at a place called Basement Workshop.

Word got out and on the day of the meeting, a basement in Chinatown was packed to standing room outside the front door. A person named Danny Yung greeted everyone. The first thing Rocky says is he and Terry are leaving for the West coast and would someone like to take over the planning of this pamphlet. Myself and Takashi volunteered. We became the co-coordinators of Yellow Pearl and that's how uptown came downtown.

HOWIE: Wow. That's pretty crazy. What I do know about Basement was that it was community specific yet very intersectional. For example, the people who performed or showed up there weren't just from the Asian community. There seemed to be an understanding that it was part of something larger.

ARLAN: Everyone who has some relationship with Basement has their own story. But it was the early period when the coalition was setting its tone. The glue that held everything together at that time was Chris, Joanne, and Charlie. They were performing anti-war rallies, Asian American rallies, and Chinatown activities. Through them, one was easily exposed to, for instance, the Young Lords, in an overlapping zone where different political consciousnesses, parties, and struggles intersected. Those were heady times. The connections with Third World internationalism seemed so clear. It was more than just Chinatown.

HOWIE: How did your experience at Basement—the politically charged activities and projects that you took on—resolve with or dissolve your experience of art?

**“THERE IS NO DEADLINE
IN FINDING YOUR ASIAN
AMERICAN SOUL.”**

ARLAN: The idea that art should serve the people takes root. School is an afterthought, but I still have to pass my classes. I do not want to disappoint my parents. Even with Yellow Pearl meetings dominating five out of six days a week I managed to squeak by and get my BFA. Art school curriculum seems useless in cultural art work.

My time at Basement was one minute in the long history of Basement Workshop. But it coincided with the dawn of the Asian American Movement. It was a period that changed my life forever.

HOWIE: In the wake of this profound change, how did you involve art in the community?

ARLAN: Murals seemed to be a resolution. There was a political mural movement bursting in San Francisco (La Raza) and Chicago in the early seventies. We started the first mural right before I left for San Francisco in 1972. When I came back, I plunged right into Cityarts Workshop. Every summer we would paint two murals. Alan Okada, Tomie Arai, Karl Matsuda, Susan Shapiro, Jim

Jannuzzi, Sue Green, and Alfredo Hernandez were the mainstays. It was a multicultural and multinational group. It was also an activity that was rooted in community, designed and painted by everyone. Murals were the outlet for politics.

HOWIE: What were the subjects of these murals?

ARLAN: They ranged from ethnic identities to Maoist politics to gender politics to celebrations of life.

HOWIE: Interesting and says a lot about social and political milieu of the left at the time.

ARLAN: That was what my art was all about then. It was collective and generous. We studied how political murals were done historically, tracing a thread from the Mexican muralist to the influential Chicago mural movement to the Maoist peasant painters of China. I revered Diego Rivera having touched his art when I was in high school.

HOWIE: By the mid to late 1970s, there was

obviously fatigue in leftist movements with the calcification of American politics and bad economy. How did that feel to you entering the 1980s?

ARLAN: I essentially burnt out from my revolutionary zeal. Lillian and I got married and we started moving in a more moderate path. She worked for AALDEF (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund). I turned back to painting searching for redemption.

HOWIE: Was it mainly the internal politics that seemed intractable or that the revolution did not deliver the promise of real change?

ARLAN: The revolution started to turn into an authoritarian track. I was in a cultural study group making posters, and we sort of became workers for their propaganda with instructions in form and content. It was art for telling the people and not art in serving the people. I became disillusioned and wanted out. I wanted to smoke my own tobacco.

HOWIE: Art became a space of freedom and individuality.

ARLAN: This is when I realized art had always saved me. It is my salvation. Art provides the arena where I can confront my demons or travel to a seemingly free weightless space in my mind.

However, there was a dilemma between community-oriented art and the individual type of easel art. They seemed diametrically opposed. That was the new struggle that I found myself in again.



SQUID FRAMES

HOWIE: During this time you also started an art framing business in New York.

ARLAN: After Yellow Pearl in 1972, I went back to San Francisco and worked for my friend, Joe Yick, as a truck driver for about a year. Karl Matsuda and I had already planned on opening a frame shop before I left. We wanted a way to make some money and have a place to do work for the community and do

silkscreens with Basement. We opened Squid Frames.

HOWIE: There is an unwritten history of important Asian-owned art framers in New York City. Some of them are legendary to artists and galleries through the decades. How was business in the beginning as a startup?

ARLAN: Nobody wanted frames. Karl interned for a few artists when he was at Cooper, so we hit them up. Lawrence Weiner lived upstairs from a gallery called Let There Be Neon. Rudy Stern needed Plexibox bases and tables and clocks for his neon. Somewhere in our experience we knew how to work in plexiglass. We did all that stuff for over a year. One day Sol LeWitt shows up and orders 100 white wood frames. And that's how we started making frames.

HOWIE: Oh, wow.

ARLAN: Another artist Karl interned for was Stephen Antonakos who was wooing an art curator at a new gallery called the John Weber Gallery. Her name was Naomi Spector. Naomi

heard from Stephen we were framers, so she sent Sol over for the 100 frames. She also sent over Robert Ryman. After Naomi left to marry Stephen, Susanna Singer became the director. I remember she sent over Roman Opalka. Soon Susanna left to become Sol's manager. Jeffrey Deitch took over for a while. Weber was married to Annina Nosei. Of course Sol was loyal to us till he passed. One day this very short fellow came into the shop and said Sol referred us. That turned out to be Herb Vogel. And even to this day Paula Cooper still gets her LeWitts framed with us. Did I tell you about Peter's (my partner, Peter Chen) stormy relationship with Mary Boone? Next time.

HOWIE: That's an amazing story. Framing seemed like something that was still in line with your politics. It's honest and...

ARLAN: It's proletariat! And we needed a part-time job. We wanted a source of income while we did community work especially at Basement doing silk screens, posters, and community activities. We made \$60 a week for a long time. Squid was like the hub of our being. We did everything there.



GODZILLA

HOWIE: After a disenchantment with collectivism in the late 1970s, how did you re-engage with a collaborative project again?

ARLAN: I guess it was another attempt on my part to re-negotiate and merge the two paths that haunted me: the community art road and the dominant art world. You keep doing the work. You do the business end and make yourself available. But I always had a nagging feeling it wasn't for me. As much as I tried, art school colonization never consumed me. I aspired and pretended, but my heart was never totally into it. The dominant art business had a way of turning even the alternative spaces into a testing ground for their profit. And I didn't see my paintings having much relevance for the AA [Asian American] community. Structural racism began to come into consciousness. Keeping channels open to my AA artists and friends in the form of visits, lunches, openings, partying was the key in forming common ground.

HOWIE: How did structural racism play out in the scene you encountered in the 1980s?

ARLAN: Take the East Village scene. It was the perfect venue into the mainstream art market. Young white avant-garde irascibles creating a new market, but there was no room for anyone from Chinatown. It was a very white, young scene.

HOWIE: What about Martin Wong. Was he accepted by this scene? To me, he didn't seem to neatly fit anywhere or any specific community.

ARLAN: Right, Martin is of course a very different type of guy. Martin was also different because he was gay and deep into the world of graffiti. He had his San Francisco Chinatown, but it took time for Chinatown to embrace him fully.

HOWIE: I see. So he was an outsider.

ARLAN: Yeah. He's a real outsider type of guy who was always in.

HOWIE: In parallel to the East Village art

scene, there was the Catherine Gallery. How does that coalesce into the Asian American Art Center and the Godzilla moment? What kind of ethos emerged from these spaces and what were the goals?

ARLAN: Fay Chiang opened the Catherine Gallery in the old 22 Catherine Street Basement space. It was the last iteration of Basement Workshop. She wanted it to be free with no strings attached. The space was yours. She saw a need to showcase a new generation of artists confronting the art world. New fresh bonds were formed. AAAC [Asian American Arts Centre] was fully formed. Bob Lee molded a mission statement, and it was worthy. But sometimes the methodology was cumbersome. The two organizations provided platforms from which Godzilla could build.

HOWIE: What ushered you into being interested in a project like Godzilla?

ARLAN: We just hung out together for cheap lunches. And Bing asked. Essentially, that's how it started.

I remember the first meeting. It was electric. People agreed that a new world order was on the agenda. It was to be an international network. The discussion revolved around pressing for a new world order. Bing Lee, Margo Machida, and Ken Chu were the founders. Everyone else is after. Our list of objectives included a history of AA arts and a museum. Most of all people wanted inclusion in the art world on our terms. I said to myself, maybe this time it will work. This new generation has a chance. I'm in.

HOWIE: Do you think you were more cautious or skeptical because of your early exposure to a more radical politics in the late 1960s and '70s, while a lot of the politics of the younger Godzilla members were not forged from the same criticality and desire for autonomy?

ARLAN: Yes. But we had a great mix of histories and experiences in Godzilla. Besides, us old farts could ride the coattails of youth and hope.

HOWIE: What do you think are the shining accomplishments of Godzilla?

ARLAN: Shining? Like chrome? Yeah. I always feel the accomplishments are the relationships. It outshines everything else for me. The bonds of fighting battles, won or lost.

I can look back at these relationships and say we are still friends to this day. Of course, there were splits, like the recent MOCA debate, but that will pass.

HOWIE: Relationships endure despite ideological differences.

ARLAN: To a certain degree, yes. Despite our differences in perspective, the compassion I have for all these artists as people weigh heavy on me. To look back, I think one of the reasons why the Godzilla show at MOCA was so desired was that people wanted to recognize the group's achievement.

HOWIE: For you, what are some of the Godzilla events or programs that are indelible?

ARLAN: *A New World Order III: The Curio*

Shop at the Artists' Space.

HOWIE: Why does that show stand out for you?

ARLAN: I remember the big curatorial debate over *The Curio Shop* was whether or not it should be juried. Of course, I wanted everyone to be in it. It was Godzilla's first show, and whoever wanted to be in it should be in it. We started as all, our first show should be all. There would be plenty of future shows that could be juried.

HOWIE: You were the exhibition manager, if I'm reading the records correctly, right?

ARLAN: Installer.

HOWIE: According to the paper, it's more than that.

ARLAN: Maybe. [Laugh]

HOWIE: Looking back at Godzilla, what were the things that could have been done differently in terms of pursuing a program of

visibility, reform, and inclusion?

ARLAN: I guess we could've done a million things differently. But in the heat of the moment we're just doing things by the seat of our pants, and it's always better to be lucky than good. I know many disagree with me, but I always thought the Whitney incursion was a high point as far as outside perception goes. But I always thought that was the beginning of Godzilla's downfall. The collective power we had began to crumble under the weight of new people hoping being a part of Godzilla would enable them a track into the art market. We sort of fell into the old colonial trap of capitalism. Don't get me wrong, inclusion was a major goal for the group and it was a major accomplishment. Just my opinion.

HOWIE: Ultimately, it is an individualizing process that undermines collectivity.

ARLAN: Yes. It produces the ladder.

HOWIE: It depletes the collective energy. Individualism is built into the dominant narrative of art—the myth of the singular artistic genius

seems to be the main figure of dominant art historization.

ARLAN: The anointed one.



PIE

HOWIE: I am surprised you haven't brought up your pie metaphor—I have heard you use this reference many times over the years in both public and private discussions. Other people are no strangers to this too.

ARLAN: There are lyrics in one of Chris and Nobuko's songs that defiantly declare, "we don't want a piece of your pie, we wanna bake our own." It became my mantra for many years. During the Godzilla years I said, "OK I'll take a piece." Now, it's, "I don't need it."

HOWIE: It seems to be an enduring mantra.

ARLAN: Yes it is. Finding and shaping your voice takes a long time. Presenting that voice

is critical. A tough question is for whom do you make art? So the mantra shifts into I don't need your pie, I have my own.

HOWIE: Would you say it's because your art is not just about art per se but a way of living and being with others?

ARLAN: Yes. The art I produce is evidence that I see through Asian American eyes. Evidence that I've thought about and traveled through all those things. And yes, a way of living in communion with life.



US

HOWIE: What does it mean when you say the show we are organizing at Pearl River Gallery is "only for us?" Who is this "us"?

ARLAN: What is your take on us?

HOWIE: When I organize exhibitions in this zone we are discussing, I try to hone a sensibility that

takes on the wider frame of marginalized people. Even if the show is about, let's say trans or indigenous art, which have very specific subjectivities and histories, I want it to resonate on a political level with many more people who have been excluded or had a history of displacement, dispossession, and dehumanizing violence.

That's why I viewed the MOCA controversy the way I did: I want it to be more than just a neighborhood squabble in the eyes of mainstream news and contemporary art discourse. I was interested in how can we connect the dots from within to forge connections with the anti-racist, abolitionist, and anti-gentrification movement. How can we be hyper specific, but also constantly touch outward? And how not to be legible by just one person, but to feel legible among people, right? Through an exhibition, we may actually demonstrate solidarity with people who feel alone and don't feel they have political affinity or community.

ARLAN: Like you, I want to hone a sensibility that allows a wider frame. But I want to do it by turning inward into my personal

“MY TIME AT BASEMENT WAS ONE MINUTE IN THE LONG HISTORY OF BASEMENT WORKSHOP. BUT IT COINCIDED WITH THE DAWN OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT.”

space. I want to present my archive of Asian American artists and the ephemera that touches my life. These are the relationships that have shaped my art and allowed me to express my voice. These are the artists I've bonded with through time and shared battles in search of AA eyes. And it is important that we all witness this gathering. It is evidence of "we."



BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

HOWIE: I was just looking at something you wrote, "My art is more Asian American than it's ever been." When I read this, my mind struggled to understand what that means and what it would look like to a viewer. Is this related to an internal grappling of burden of representation for Asian American artists?

ARLAN: A few years ago, I blurted that out. The minute I said it, I questioned why I would

say that. I don't even know what it means. It's taking years to figure things out, but I'm getting closer. Decolonizing my formal art training is a hard thing to do. In this unpacking process there are moments of brilliant clarity, and I see through Asian American eyes. The statement, "my art is more Asian American than it's ever been" comes from one of these sparks. Then the flash fades, and I'm back to stumbling into the trap of systematic art racism and guessing why I said that. Sometimes the pieces fit, sometimes not.

We all have to deal with the burden of representation. At its core, it is about stereotypes. Long ago we learned you cannot deny negative stereotypes. The way to combat them is to embrace them, make them bigger with depth and dimension. When confronted with a situation, we must read the situation carefully and proceed with care. It happens with all people. Seeing through my eyes and my art as Asian American gives me agency.

HOWIE: As a follow-up question, how do you see painterly abstraction along the lines of being Asian American. What we know of the

N-th degree abstraction in the West is the evacuation of content and painter subject position, which can be a kind of luxury as opposed to identity-based abstraction you are describing.

ARLAN: We've fought so long, so many battles, we need to remember what we are fighting for. Sometimes we need to stop and live our hopes and dreams. To think free. To give ourselves permission to ask why the sky is blue. To breath in a cleansing summer breeze. People of privilege take this for granted. Everyone else cannot. In art, abstraction assumes this privilege. It is intrinsic in their art history. They own it and are keepers of the gate. My AA eyes tell me I do not make art for the gatekeeper's approval. Validation is no longer required. I explore any art I want, abstract or not. I own my art.



CHESS

ARLAN: I'm curious how you navigated all this.

HOWIE: I might be misquoting David Ham-

mons. But I remember he said somewhere that he approaches art as if he is playing chess on multiple levels at the same time. Ideally, one attends to all these issues and discourses in different spaces in a satisfying and effective way without disconnecting from one of those games. Friendship and interpersonal relations are one register. There are registers of Asian American community. Then, larger conditions of social and economic marginalization, art-historical discourse, and more. I tried to be attentive to all these registers in my projects.

Because everyone of us came from a specific contexts and histories, it's important to be able to attend to these many facets while navigating the art space—to keep the chess pieces all in the right spots in different dimensions.

ARLAN: I think I might have already thrown most of the chess pieces out. At least, I'm disengaging them.

HOWIE: Even though you are saying that, I would say from the outside that it is not true. I have seen you playing many chess games. Not in a manipulative way, but patient, strategic,

and precise. You are caring of what's going on in multiple and disparate spaces. It is certainly not about being adversarial but about being engaged. You are doing it on many levels in a very mindful way.

You said elsewhere that every stroke contains the lives of all your friends and family. So does this exhibition that we're making together. Each piece contains compassion, deliberation, and care.

ARLAN: Working with you and Danielle has been a blessing. You bring clarity to my fuzzy intuition. Thank you. The process of shaping this show has sparked moments of epiphany. "My art is more Asian American than it's ever been" becomes a bit clearer. I would like to have all the artists in my archive witness our art together. We've done it all for each other. We own our vision.

HOWIE: The last question I want to ask is that, if there is one, what is the goal of this exhibition at the Pearl River Mart?

ARLAN: Pearl River is a family business that has

kept the original mom and pop work ethic. After 50 years Mr. and Mrs. Chen still come to work every day. Joanne has shaped and expanded the business model while keeping the same homey enthusiasm. And like the neighborhood store it welcomes you like family. They are always willing to share their spotlight with you. The gallery they carved out is a gift for us. And gifts are reciprocal. It is a space to share and announce new things and to invigorate old and new bonds. It's like a misty Chinese banquet conjured from my childhood memory. It's the only place I want to show. It is by us for us. Our show allows me to say thank you for letting me bake my own pie. Sort of like if it wasn't for we, I wouldn't be me.

PLATES

Willie Leong, Jim Tsang, Sam Fromartz,
Peter Jung, Alfredo Hernandez, Arlan Huang, and Phil
Gim at Squid Frames, 270 Bowery Street, 1980.
Photograph by Philip Yee.



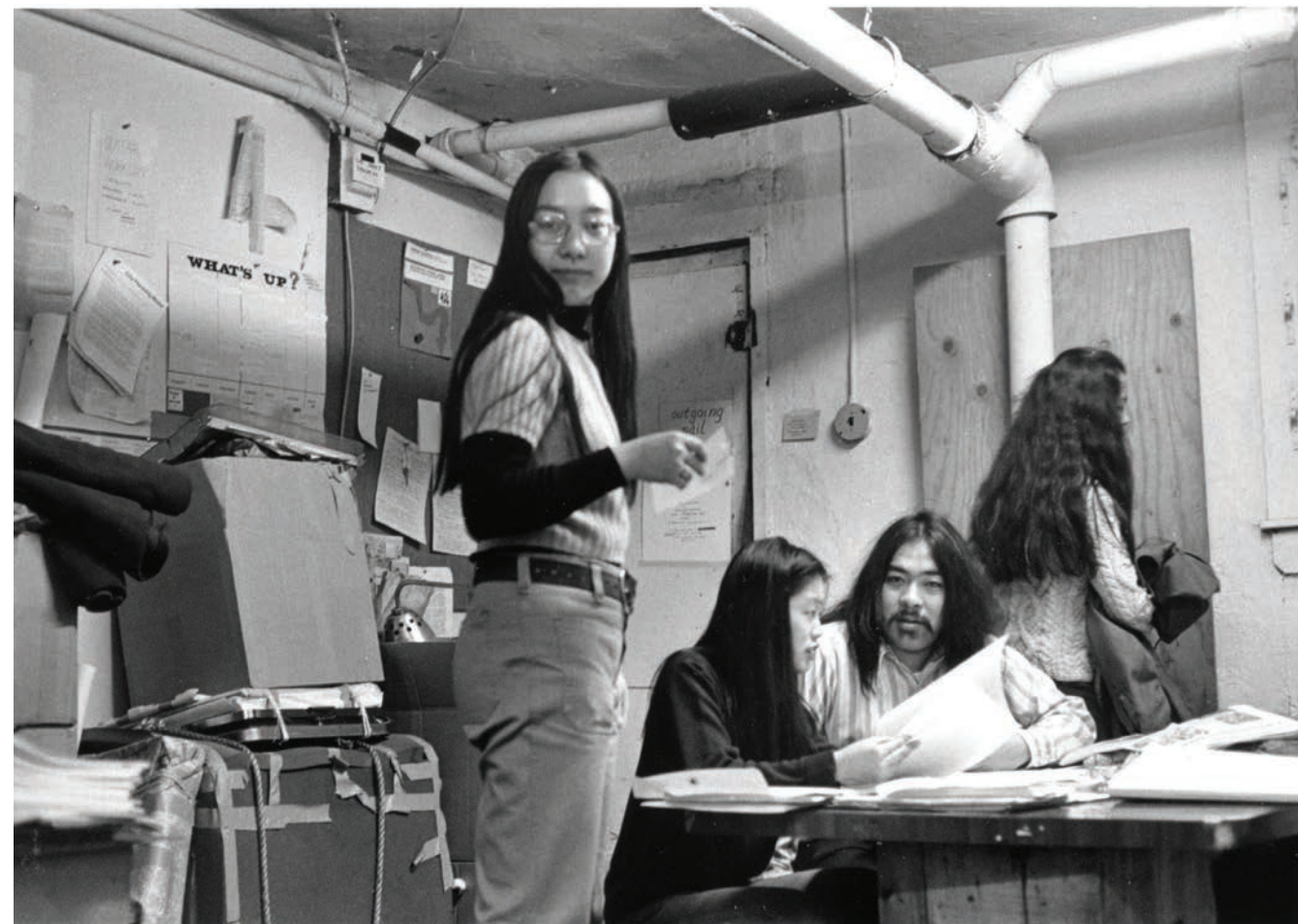
Basement Workshop members Charlie Chin, Nobuko Miyamoto, and Chris Iijima rehearsing at Gerde's Folk City, New York, 1971.
Photograph by Bob Hsiang.



Asian Coalition march featuring Chris Iijima, Karl Matsuda, Harold Lui, Aiko Herzig Yoshinaga, Don Yee, Yuri Kochiyama, and Terry Dofoo, ca. 1971.
Photograph by Victor Huey.



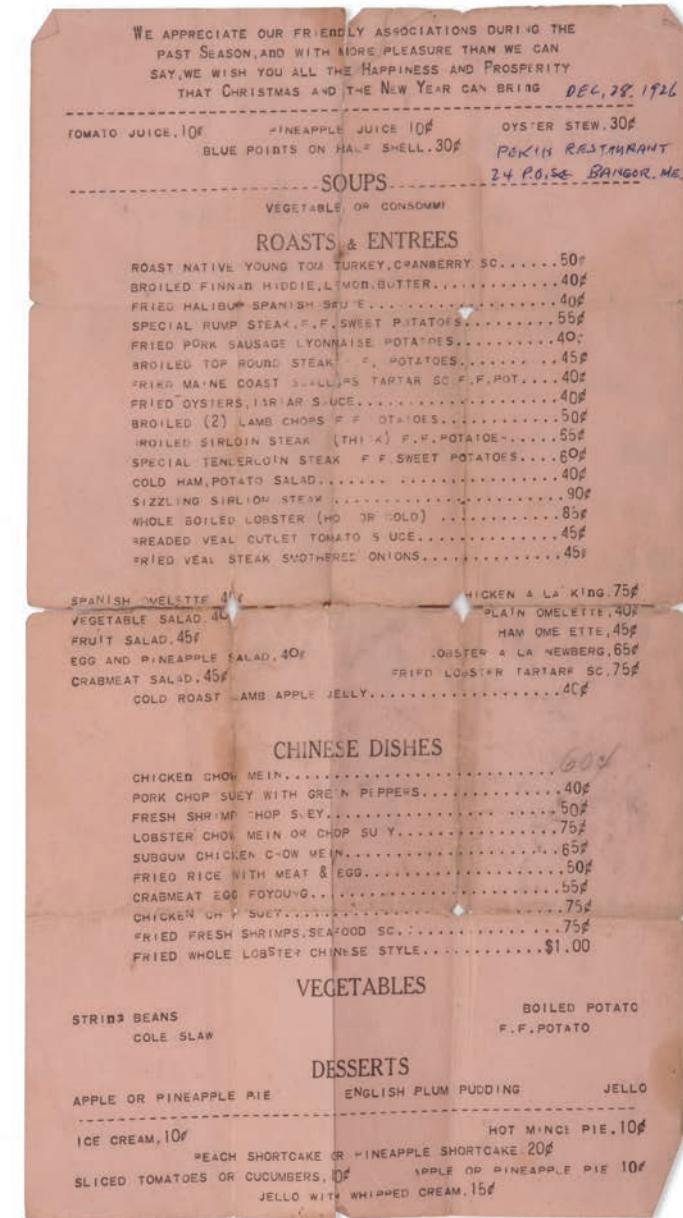
Fay Chew, Lydia Tom, Takashi Yanagida,
and Lisa Abe at Basement Workshop, 1971.
Photograph by Hoyt Soohoo.



Irons belonging to Arlan Huang's family that the artist fondly refers to as "8 lb Livelihood," ca. 1930s.



Unknown artist
 Menu from Pekin Restaurant, Bangor, Maine, 1926
 Ink on paper
 6 x 4 inches

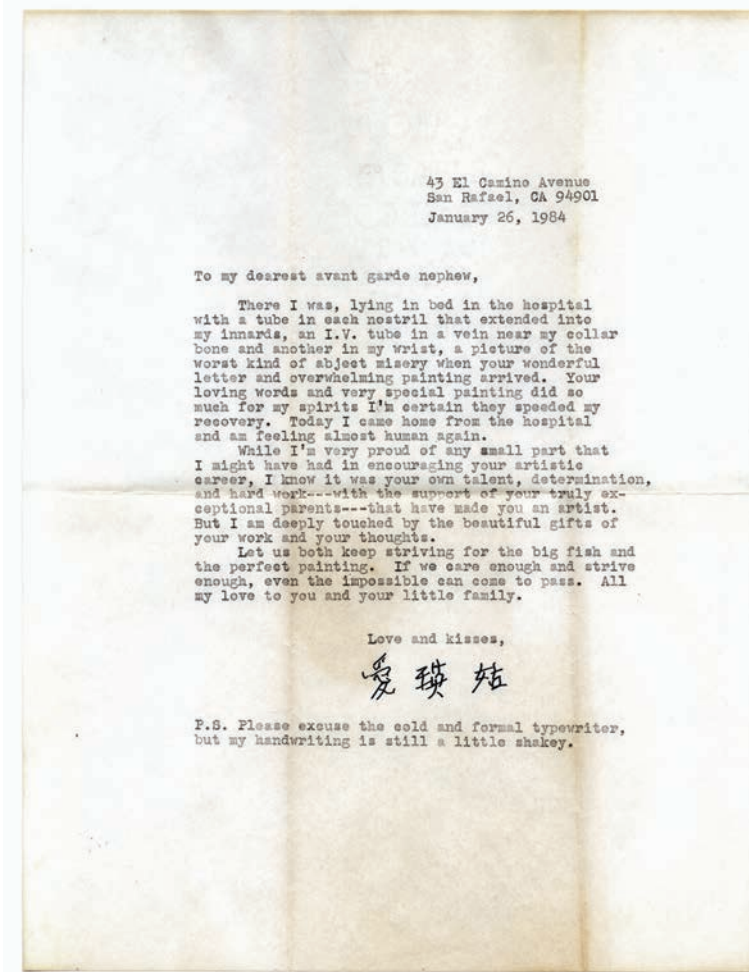


Unknown artist
Crate label for Charles N. Kim Sweet Edison Oranges,
ca. 1960s
Laser print on paper
9 x 9 inches





Edith Lew
Untitled, 1984
Watercolor on paper
11 x 14 inches



Letter from Arlan Huang's aunt, Edith Lew, January 26, 1984.

Untitled, 1972.
Photograph by Corky Lee.

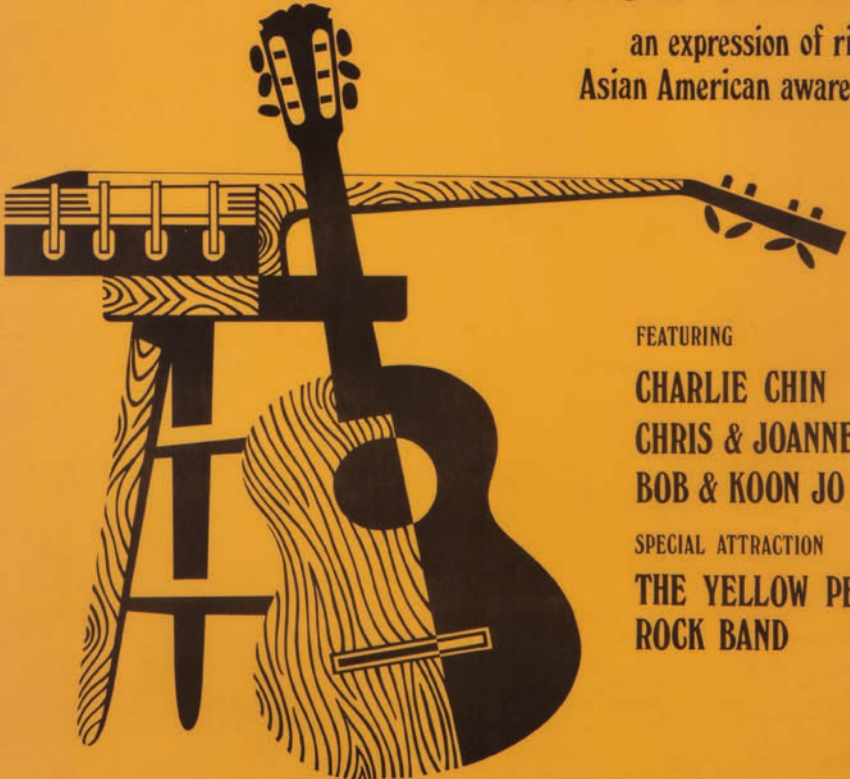


Fay Chiang at Basement Workshop,
22 Catherine Street, 1973.
Photograph by Henry Chu.



Alan Okada
Yellow Pearl, 1972
Offset printing on paper
26 x 20 inches

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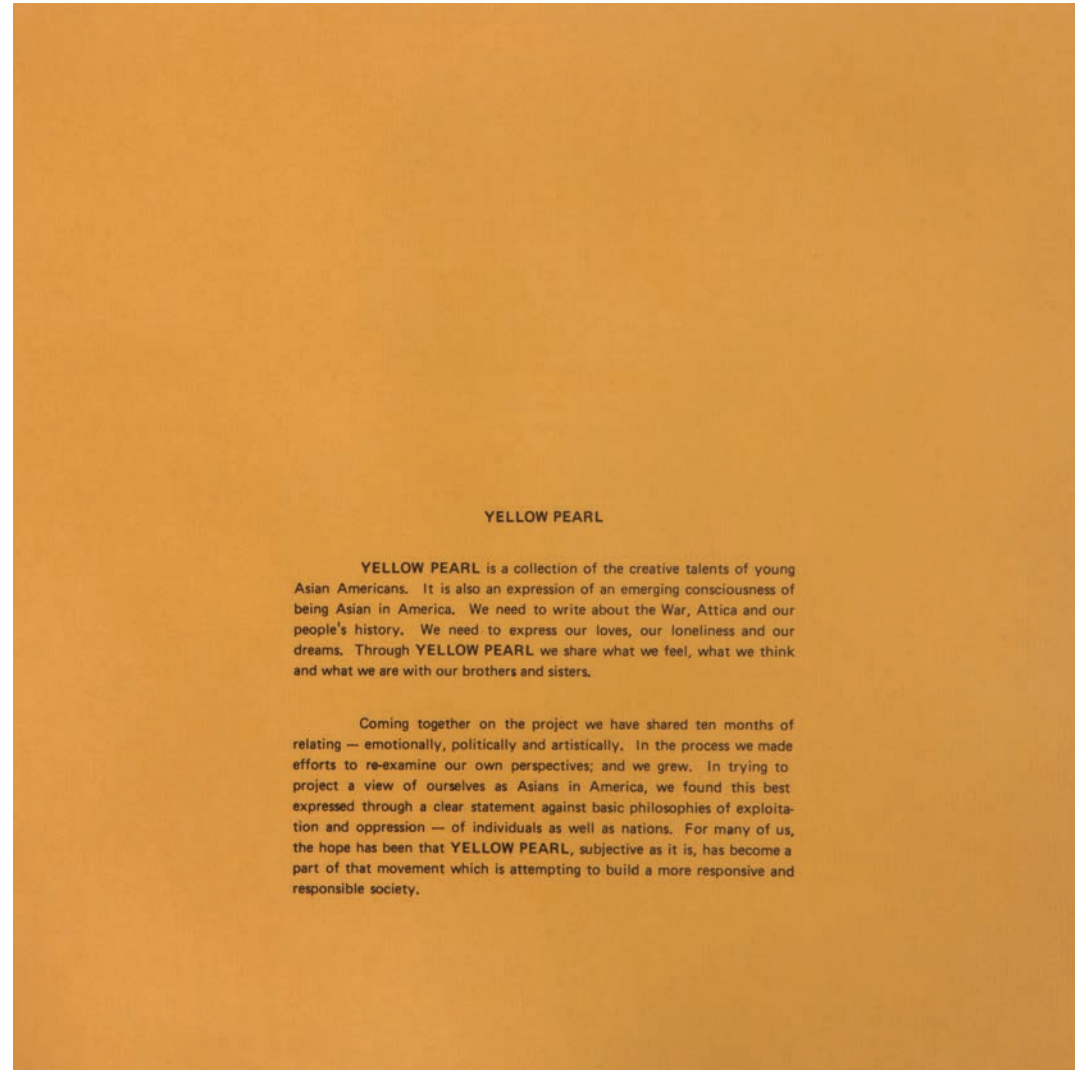
Various artists
Yellow Pearl, 1972
 Offset printing on paper
 12 x 12 inches

Godzilla: Asian American Art Network
From Basement to Godzilla, 1999
 Offset printing on paper
 12 x 12 inches

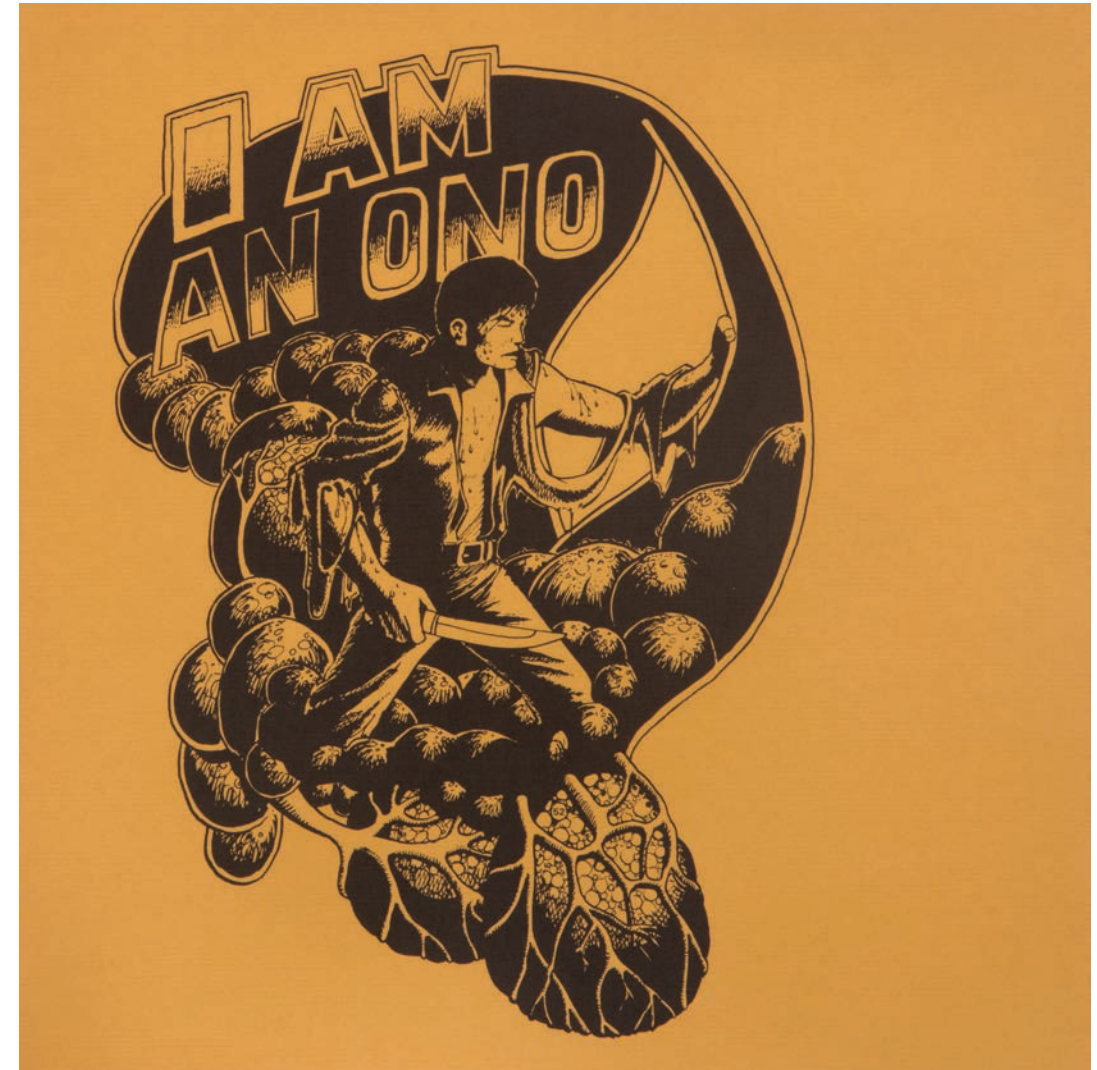
From the portfolio *Yellow Pearl*, 1972



From the portfolio *Yellow Pearl*, 1972



From the portfolio *Yellow Pearl*, 1972



YELLOW PEARL MIYAMOTO — IJIMA

A grain
a grain of sand
landing in the belly
in the belly of the monster

and time is telling
only how long it takes
layer after layer
as its beauty unfolds
until its captor
it holds in peril

a grain
a tiny grain of sand

In the o-cean oys-ter beds re- pose be-neath the
sea o- pen one and you might find
deep in one of dif-fer-ent mind one who looks like me in
Rome the Sen-ate cham-ber rang vic-to-ry was the call de-
feat in- vad-ers from the North But they weren't best at all

E (sus4) E CHORUS F#m7 A B F#m7
and I am a Yel- low pearl and
F#m7 A B F#m7 A B F#m7 A B
you are a Yel- low pearl and we are the Yel- low pearl
D9 and we are half the world and we are half the
F#9 F#9 E9 D9
world and we are half the world and we are half the world

Now you might say I'm just a dream - er
pearls like you just don't ap-pear
and I re- fuse to grant you schem-er
rec-og-ni-tion that you're here

now you can say just what you want
but my hurt has ceased
I see signs of my- self
come drift- ing in from the East


Chorus

and time is telling
only how long it takes
layer after layer
as our beauty unfolds
until our captor
we'll hold in peril

a grain
a tiny grain of sand,

Copyright ©
Chris Iijima and
Joanne Miyamoto 1972

From the portfolio *From Basement to Godzilla*, 1999.



From Basement to Godzilla

This commemorative, limited-edition portfolio represents a moment in time in the continuing legacy of Asian American activism in the arts. It is designed to complement the installation *From Basement to Godzilla*, part of the *Urban Encounters* exhibition, curated by Gregory Sholette at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, July 16- September 20, 1998.

Formed in 1990, Godzilla Asian American Art Network is a group of New York-based Asian/Pacific Islander and Asian/Pacific Islander American visual artists and arts professionals whose goal is to establish a forum that will foster information exchange, mutual support, documentation, and networking among our expanding numbers in the United States. For *Urban Encounters*, Godzilla pays tribute to a critical element of Asian American history, Basement Workshop, an activist collective formed in 1971 that operated in New York City's Asian American community. Basement Workshop generated art and music, supported community-based healthcare, and was deeply involved in political organizing. One of Basement Workshop's outstanding early projects was *Yellow Pearl*, the boxed collection of songs, artwork, and poetry published in 1972.

In the spirit of *Yellow Pearl*, *From Basement to Godzilla* is dedicated to all those who came before, and to all those who are yet to come.


Godzilla Exhibition Committee

John Allen
Skowmon Hastanan
Arlan Huang
Barbara Hunt
Cynthia Lee
Sally Leung
Frank Liu
Janice Pono
Athena Robles
Amy Sadao
Maureen Wong
Virgil Wong

This project was made possible in part with support from Art in General, Asian American Arts Alliance, members of Basement Workshop, Ken Chu, Downtown Community Television, Godzilla, Fay Chiang, David Chung, Devora Hill, Michi Itami, Lillian Ling, New Museum of Contemporary Art, Squid Frames, T & K Printing, Virgil Wong, Visual AIDS, Eleanor Yung, as well as artists and individuals.

250 copies of this portfolio have been printed by Eric But, T & K Printing, New York, February 1999. Negatives by Megan Pugh, Katz Digital, New York. Boxes by Gaylord Bros., Syracuse, NY.

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From the portfolio *From Basement to Godzilla*, 1999.



9. **Jean Chiang**, *Hand*, 1998, felt pen on paper.

10. **Alex Chin**, *30 Years ... Unchanged (Still Crazy)*, 1998, ink and collage.

11. **Ken Chu**, *Tong Zhi*, 1998, laser print.

12. **Allan de Souza**, *Dick*, 1997, digital print.

13. **Ming Fay**, *Left Eye*, 1998, xerox and felt pen.

14. **Great Leap**, *A Grain of Sand*, live at Folk City 1972, photo by Bob Hsiang © 1997 (center); Chris Iijima (bottom right), Nobuko Miyamoto (bottom left), "Charlie" Chin (top), photos by Brad Shirakawa, 1997.

15. **Skowmon Hastanan**, *Graceful Travellers: Purple Glory*, 1998, color xerox collage.

16. **Arlan Huang/Fay Chiang**, *Sweet Rice*, 1998, acrylic, ink and felt pen.

17. **Jason Kao Hwang**, *Immigrant of the Womb*, 1996, operatic poem, text and music.

18. **Michi Itami**, *Tsuioku*, 1998, digital print.

19. **William Jung**, *Lion Dancers*, 1998, pen and ink.

20. **Byron Kim**, *A Sign of Quality*, 1998, scanned image and text.

21. **Franky Kong/Jenni Kim**, *From Childhood Pictures*, 1998, gouache/ghesso.

22. **Nina Kuo**, *Punk Cut*, 1993, montage photo.

23. **Bing Lee**, Untitled, excerpt from *Pictodiary*, 1998, digital print and ink.

24. **Colin Lee**, Untitled, 1991/98, photo.

25. **Corky Lee**, *Alan Okada at Soh Daiko Rehearsal for Day of Remembrance*, 1998, photo.

26. **Cynthia Lee**, Untitled, 1998, digital print.

27. **Lanie Lee**, *Life Journal*, 1998, photo.

28. **Robert Lee**, *Grid Mechanic*, 1972, xerox.

29. **Sally Leung**, *Fashion/ Oppression*, 1998, paper collage.

30. **Frank Liu**, *Happiness*, 1998, digital print.

31. **Stefani Mar**, *Varada Mudra*, 1998, ink on paper.

32. **Fay Chew Matsuda**, *Cats*, 1997, color photo.

33. **Yong Soon Min**, *Back to the Future*, from the installation *Geography of Desire*, 1993, photo.

34. **Philip Tajitsu Nash**, *Haruko's Cello*, 1998, poem (text).

35. **Helen Oji**, *Views*, 1998, ink on paper.

36. **Athena Robles**, *Epics*, 1998, color xerox collage.

37. **Carol Sun**, *Ratchet @ 10*, 1997, xerox.

38. **Kim Tran**, *From Vietnam to Soho*, 1998, collage.

39. **Audrey E. Wong**, *Life & Heritage*, 1998, ink on paper.

40. **Maureen Wong**, *Pearl River*, 1998, nail polish.

41. **Virgil Wong**, *PaperVeins*, 1998, digital print.

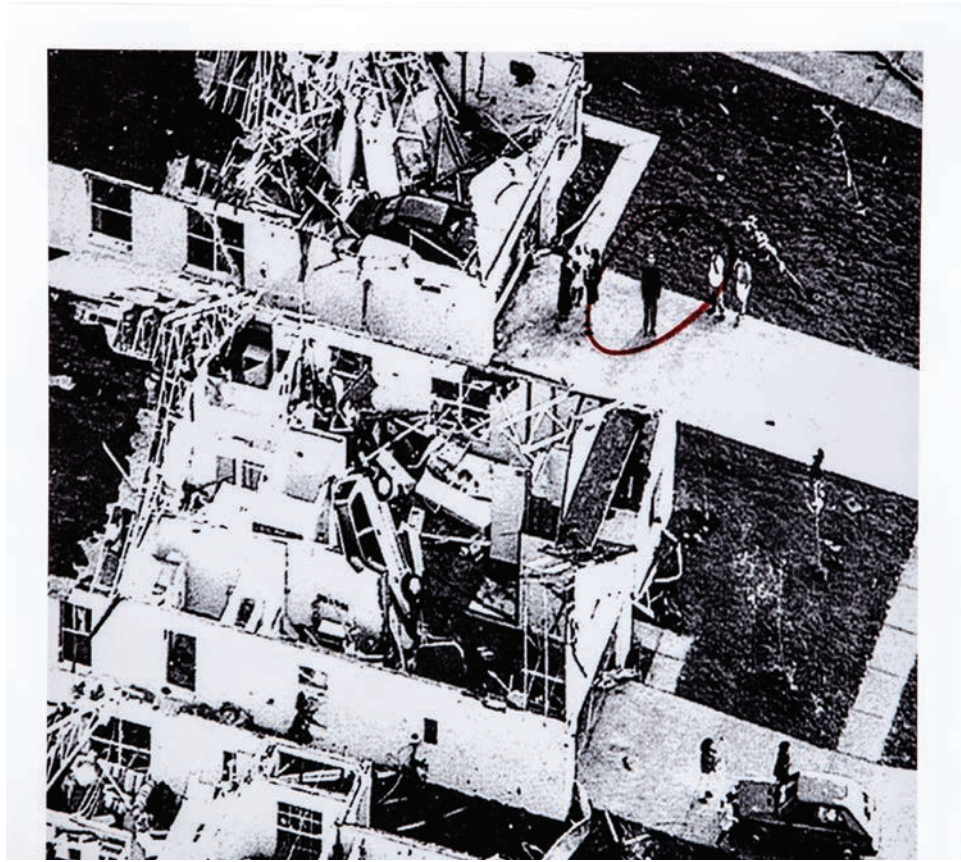
42. **Theodora Yoshikami**, *Break-Up/Alakanuk*, with Mei-Mei Bessenbrugge, 1983, dance performance (photo/text), photo by Harvey Wang.

43. **Mimi Young**, *rice dreams*, 1997, photo.

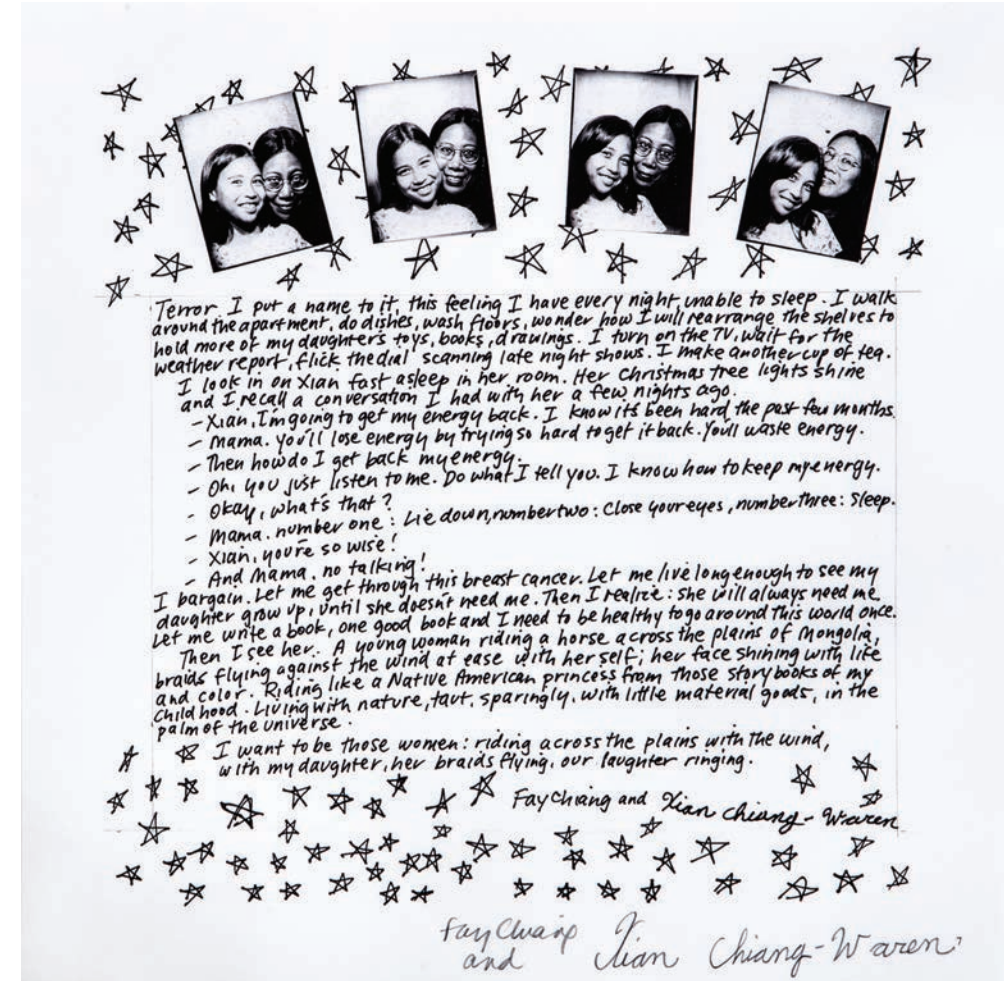
44. **Charles Yuen**, Untitled, 1998, ink on paper.

45. **Susan L. Yung**, *Paranoia Axiom Blues*, 1979/98, digital print.

46. **Zhang Hongtu**, *page 98 of a Christie's Catalog*, 1998, digital print.



Todd Ayoung
When the Private Collapses into the Public, or, Find the Artist, 1998.



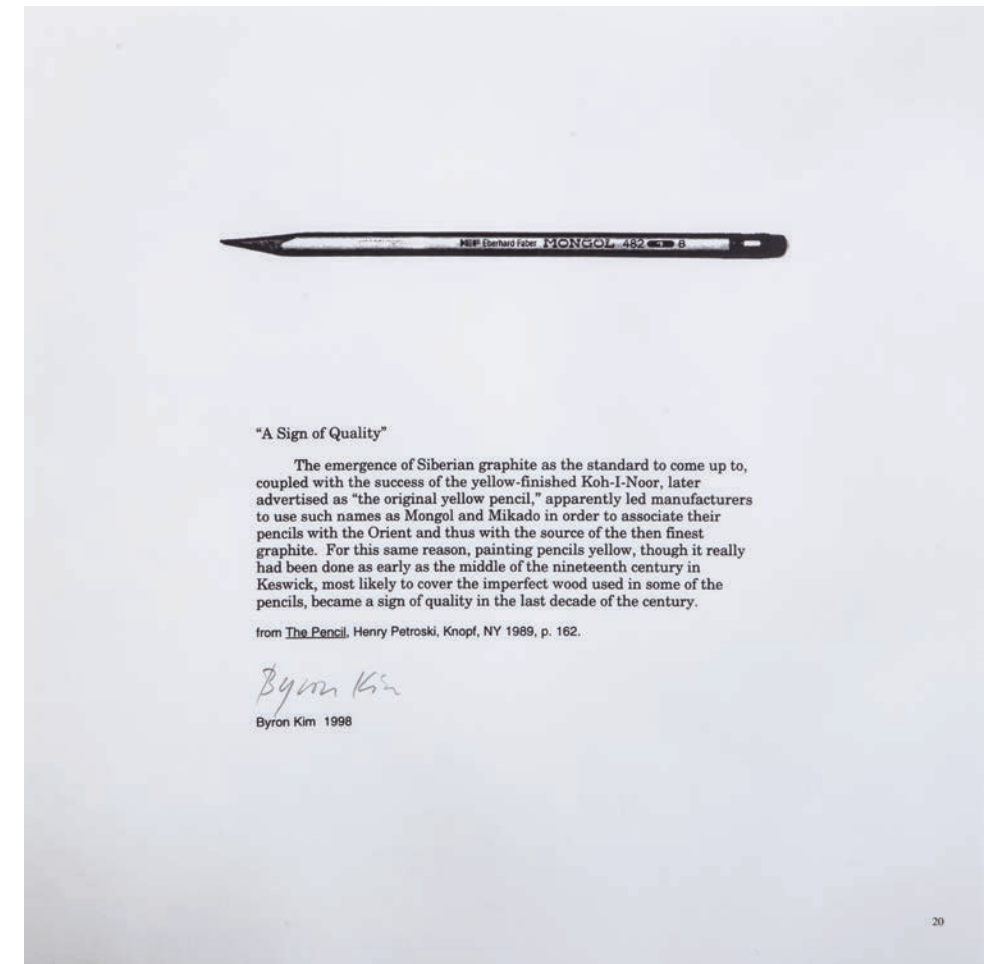
Fay Chiang/Xian Chiang-Waren
Untitled, 1998

From the portfolio *From Basement to Godzilla*, 1999.



Ken Chu
Tong Zhi, 1998

From the portfolio *From Basement to Godzilla*, 1999.



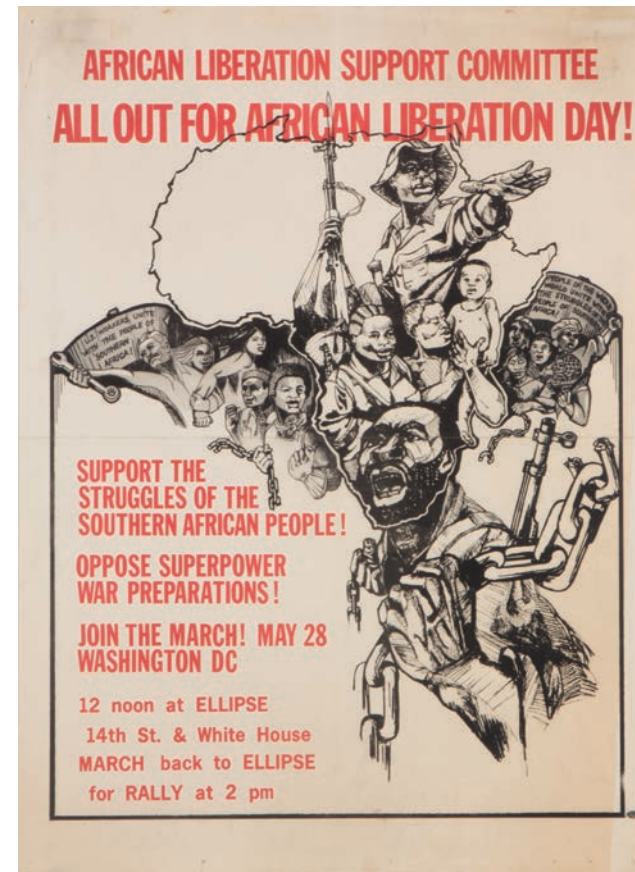
Byron Kim
A Sign of Quality, 1998



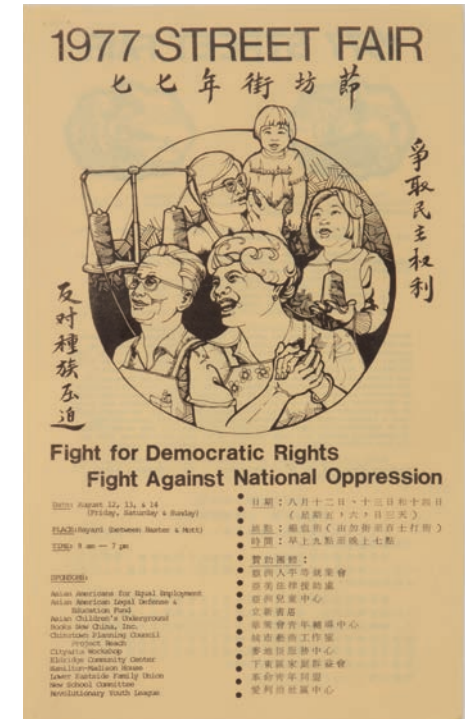
Study for *All Out for African Liberation Day!*, 1977
Graphite on tracing paper
4 x 5 inches



Study for 1977 Street Fair, 1977
Graphite on tracing paper
5 x 4 inches

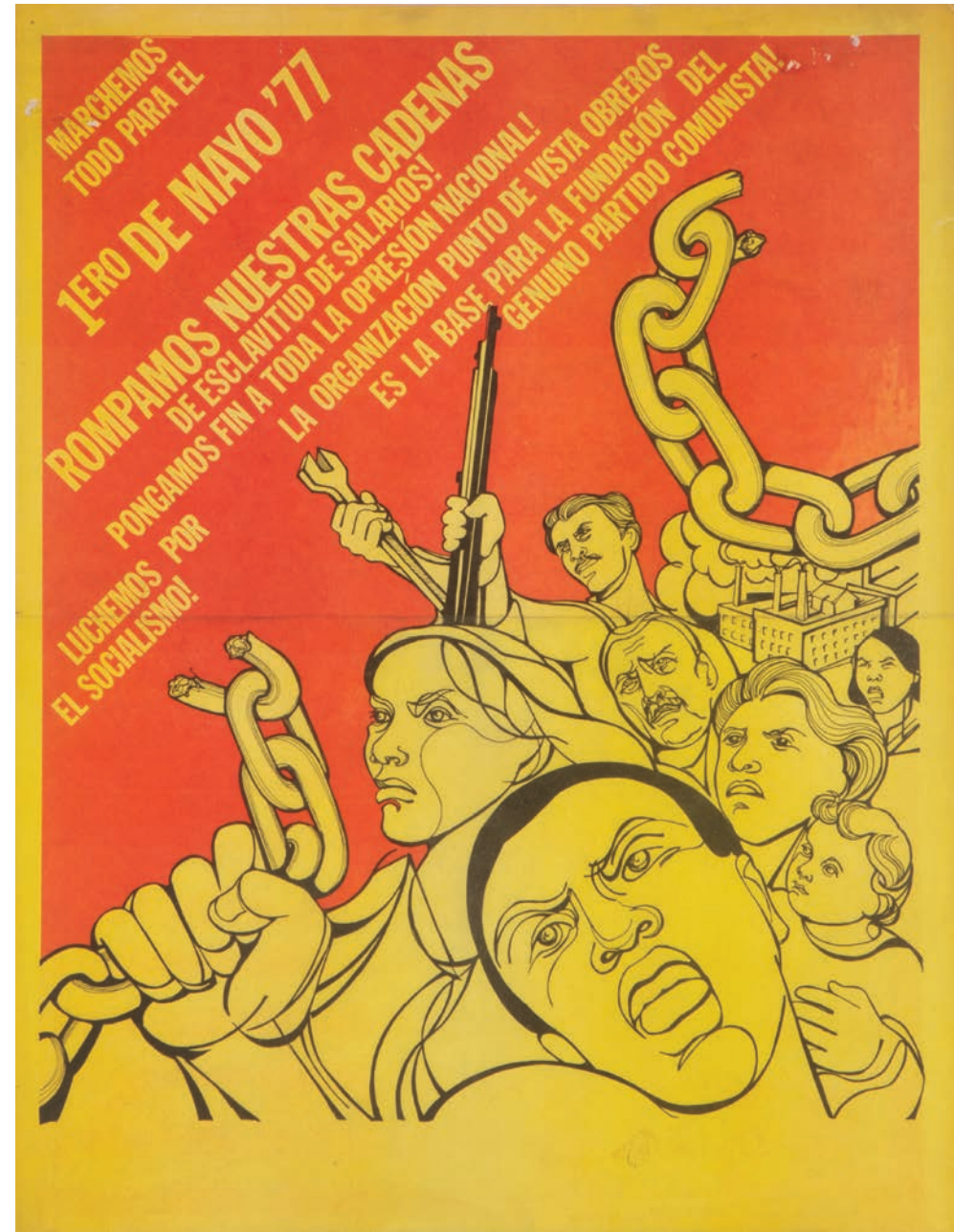


Arlan Huang
All Out for African Liberation Day!, 1977
Offset printing on paper
24 x 18 inches



Arlan Huang
1977 Street Fair, 1977
Offset printing on paper
18 x 14 inches

Tomie Arai
1ero De Mayo, 1977
Offset printing on paper
24 x 18 inches



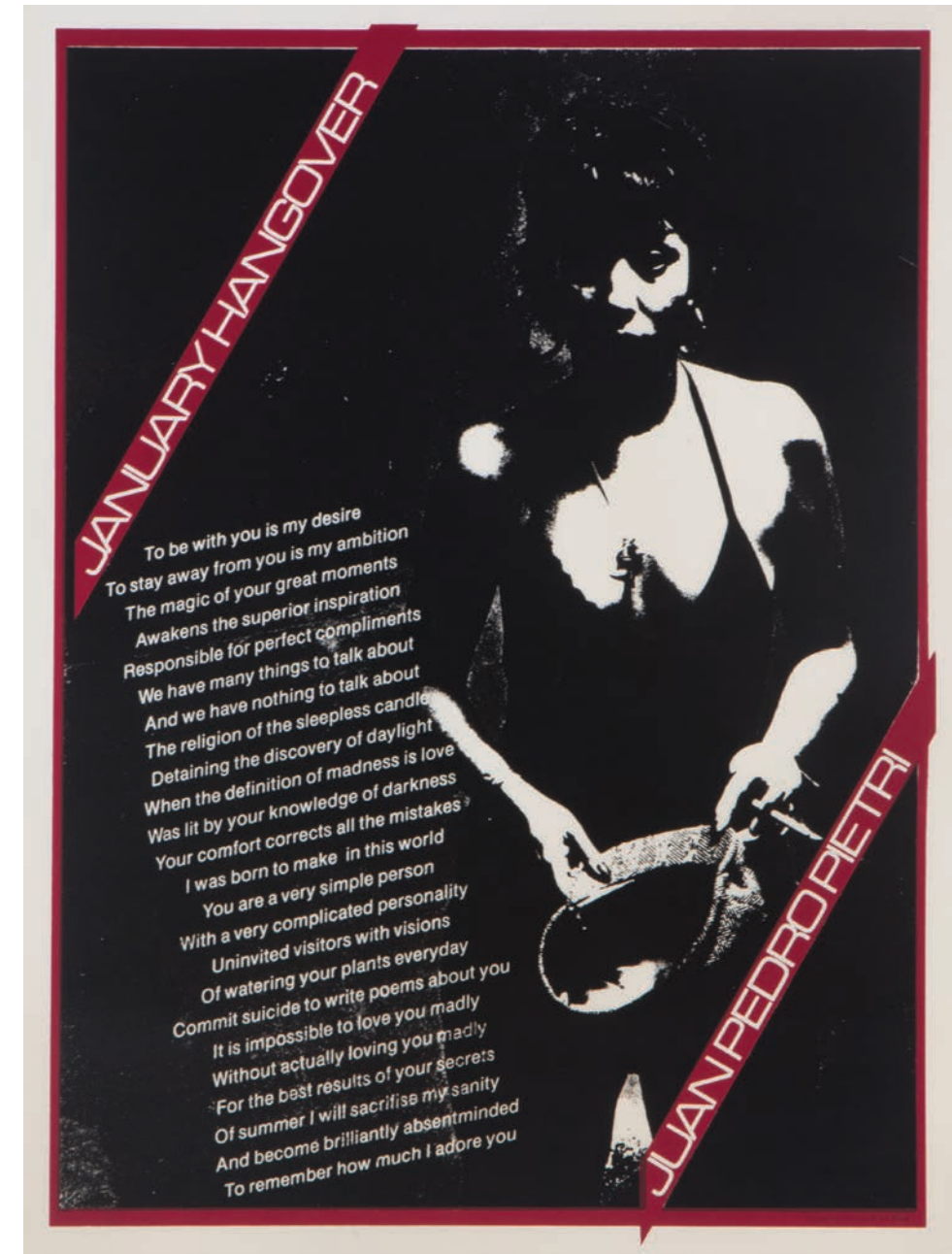


Sketch for button pin by Arlan Huang, ca. 1977.



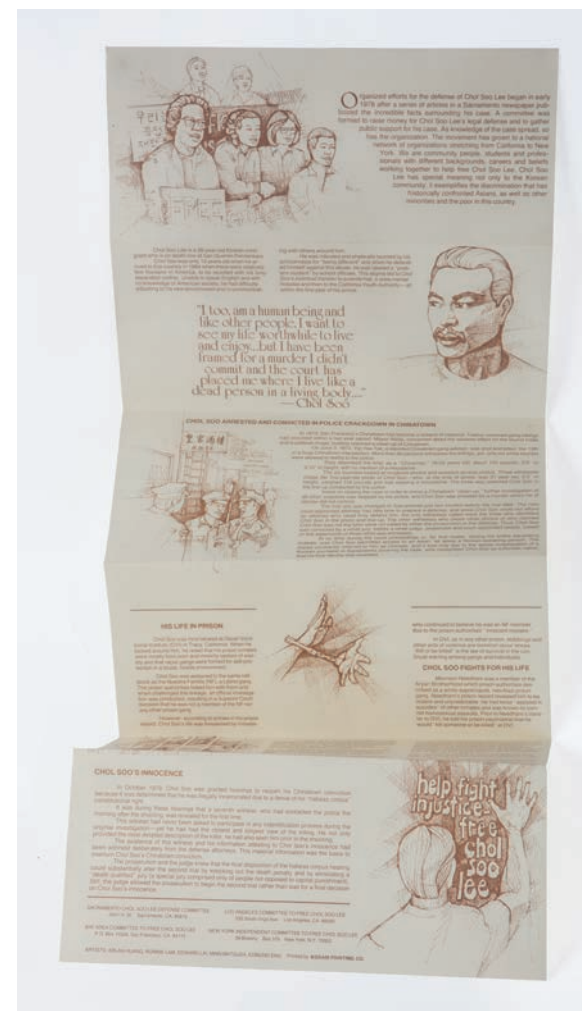
Various button pins by Tomie Arai, Alex Chin, Corky Lee, and I Wor Kuen, ca. 1970s.

John Woo
Basement poetry reading series, 1978
Silkscreen on paper
24 x 18 inches





Sketch for Chol Soo Lee brochure, 1980
 Graphite on tracing paper
 9 x 9.25 inches



Arlan Huang
 Chol Soo Lee brochure, 1980
 Offset printing
 8 x 4.5 inches folded



Colin Lee
Untitled from Basement Workshop Silkscreen Portfolio, 1982
Silkscreen
15 x 11 inches



Colin Lee
Untitled (verso) from Basement Workshop Silkscreen Portfolio, 1982

Nina Kuo
Neon Deviation from Basement Workshop Silkscreen
Portfolio, 1982
Silkscreen and acrylic paint on paper
15 x 11 inches
Edition of 100



Leland Wong
Nihonmachi Street Fair, 1984
Silkscreen on paper
24 x 18 inches





Arlan Huang and Lillian Ling, at Basement Workshop, 54 Elizabeth Street, 1971.
Photograph by Hoyt Soohoo.



Arlan Huang and Lillian Ling
Arlan Huang draws Lillian Ling, Lillian Ling draws Arlan Huang, 1979
Ink on tracing paper
4 x 5 inches



Postcard from Sol LeWitt, August 16, 1981
Ink on paper
6 x 9.5 inches



Ray Huang
Untitled, 1986
Acrylic on paper
14 x 8 inches



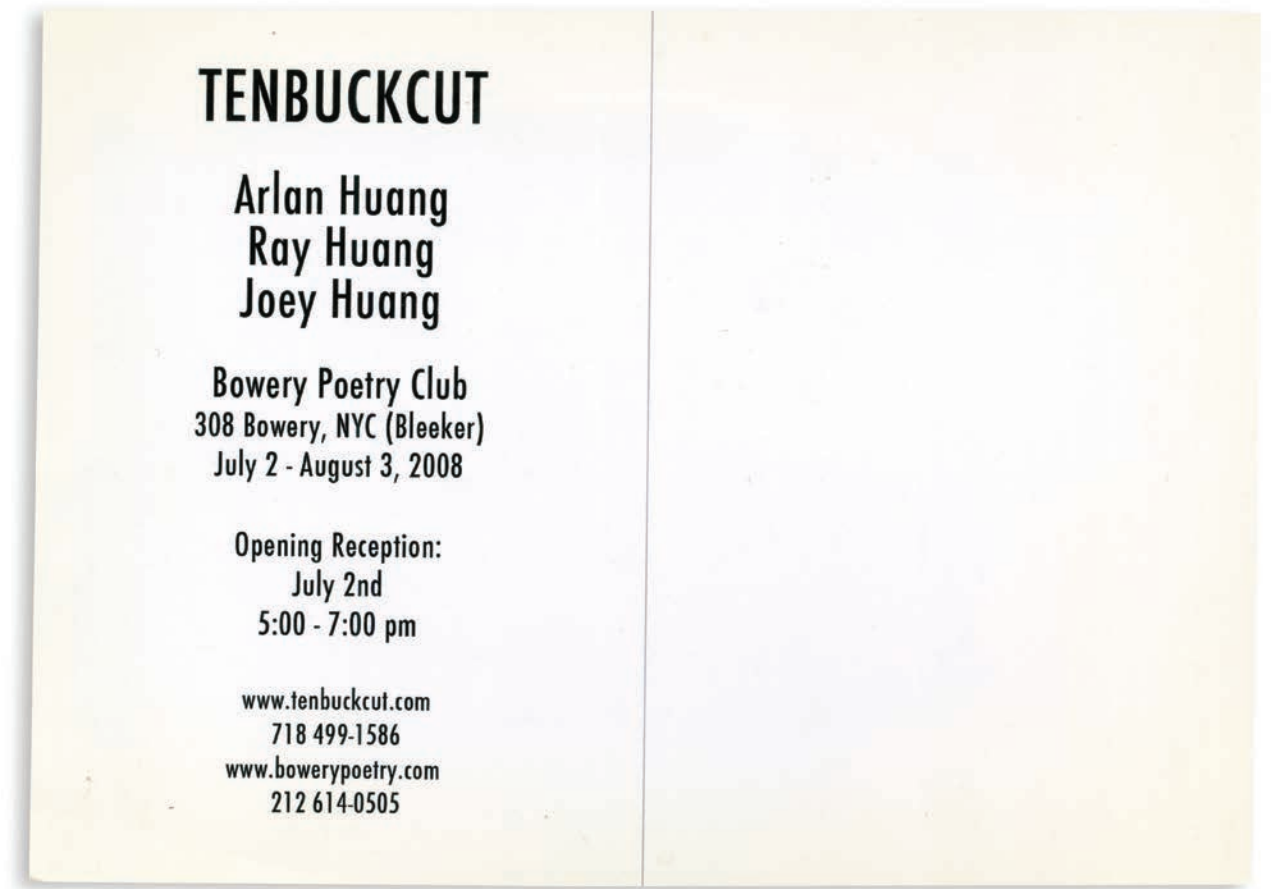
George Takei accepts the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund award with Joey Huang, Ray Huang, and David Mark, 1992.
Photograph by Corky Lee.



Joey Huang
Untitled, 2010
Glass
4 x 7 inches



Arlan Huang, Ray Huang, and Joey Huang
TenBuckCut, 2008
Offset printing on paper
4 x 5 inches



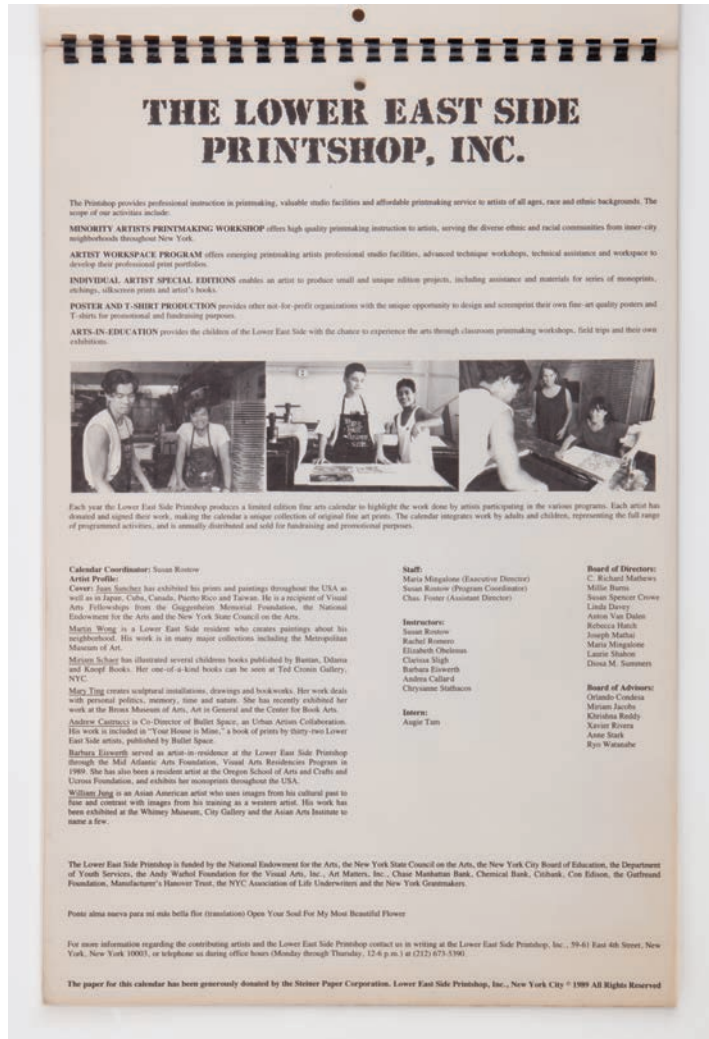
TenBuckCut (verso), 2008

1991 annual silkscreen calendar by
The Lower East Side Printshop, Inc.
20 x 13 inches
Edition 14 of 325



Juan Sanchez

From 1991 annual silkscreen calendar by The Lower East Side Printshop, Inc.



Martin Wong

From 1991 annual silkscreen calendar by The Lower East Side Printshop, Inc.



Mary Ting

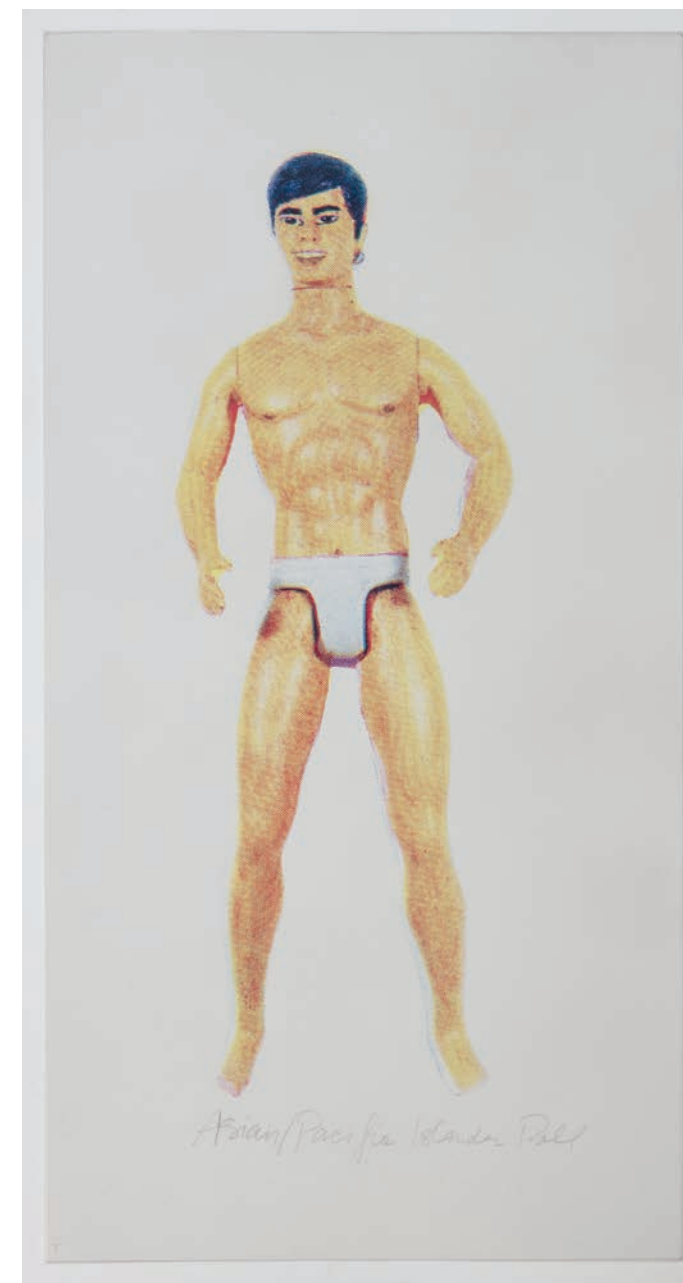


William Jung

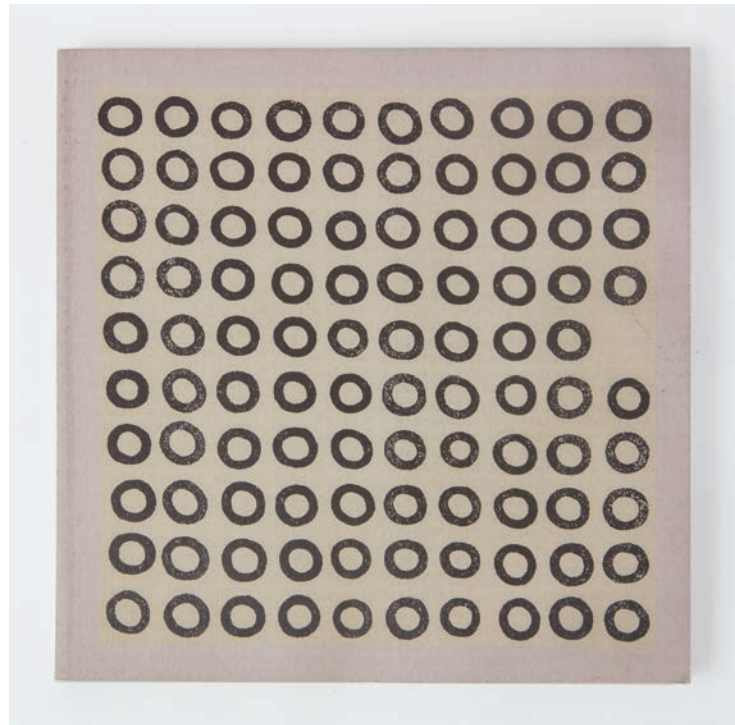
Tony Wong
Fanning the Flames, 1985
Oil pastel on paper
33 x 30 inches



Ken Chu
Asian/Pacific Islander Doll, 1992
Silkscreen on paper
19 x 10 inches



Bing Lee
Picto Diary, 1993
Paperback book
8 x 8 inches



Ik-Joong Kang
Starving Artists' Restaurant Guide, 1996
Offset printing on paper
3 x 3 inches folded



Charles Yuen
Lace, 1996
Oil on paper
14 x 15 inches



Skowmon Hastanan
Untitled, 2006
Photo transfer
8 x 11 inches



Lia Chiang
Artichokes, 2000
Digital print
3 x 4 inches



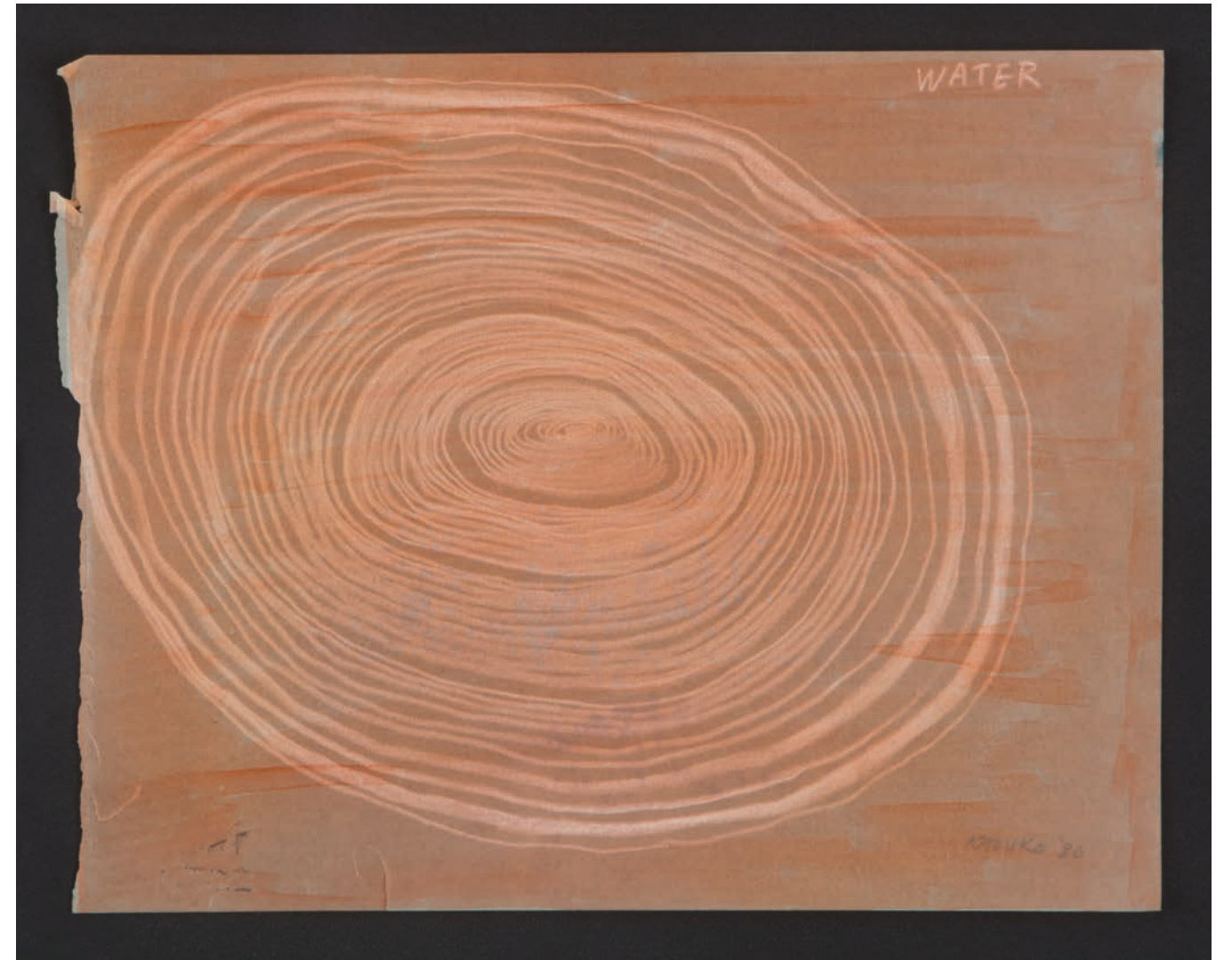
Zulu Williams
Lady Day, 1990
Silkscreen on paper
30 x 23 inches



Tomie Arai
Untitled, 2012
Heat transfer and oil on wood panel
9 x 9 inches



Kazuko Miyamoto
WATER, ca. 2015
Watercolor on paper
8 x 10 inches



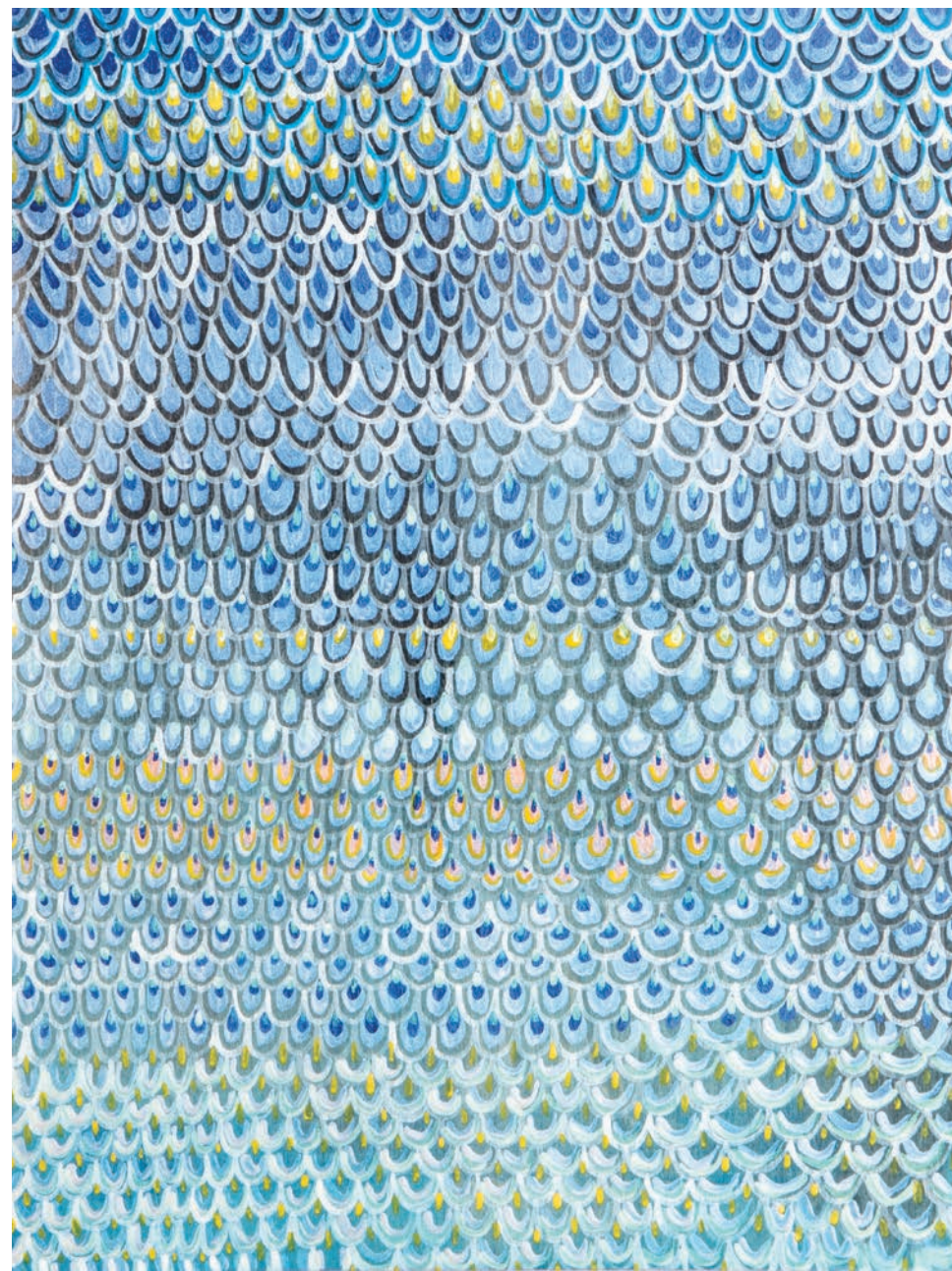
Assorted origami by Hozuki Nomoto, 2015.



Alex Paik
Improvisation #1 for Equilateral Triangle (Open), 2016
Gouache and colored pencil on paper
17 x 16 inches



Jean Rim
Untitled, ca. 2018
Acrylic on panel
12 x 9 inches



Helen Oji
Larger Conversation, ca. 2018
Gouache on paper
10 x 8 inches



Kam Mak
Bleeding Hearts, 2018
Egg tempera on aluminum panel
6 x 8 inches



Naomi Kawanishi Reis
Flowers from Y, 2019
Acrylic on pigment-printed fabric on panel
8 x 6 inches



Danielle Wu
Arlan's Oranges, 2020
Acrylic on wood panel
8 x 8 inches



Tomomi Ono
woods-night, 2019
Lithograph
17 x 17 inches



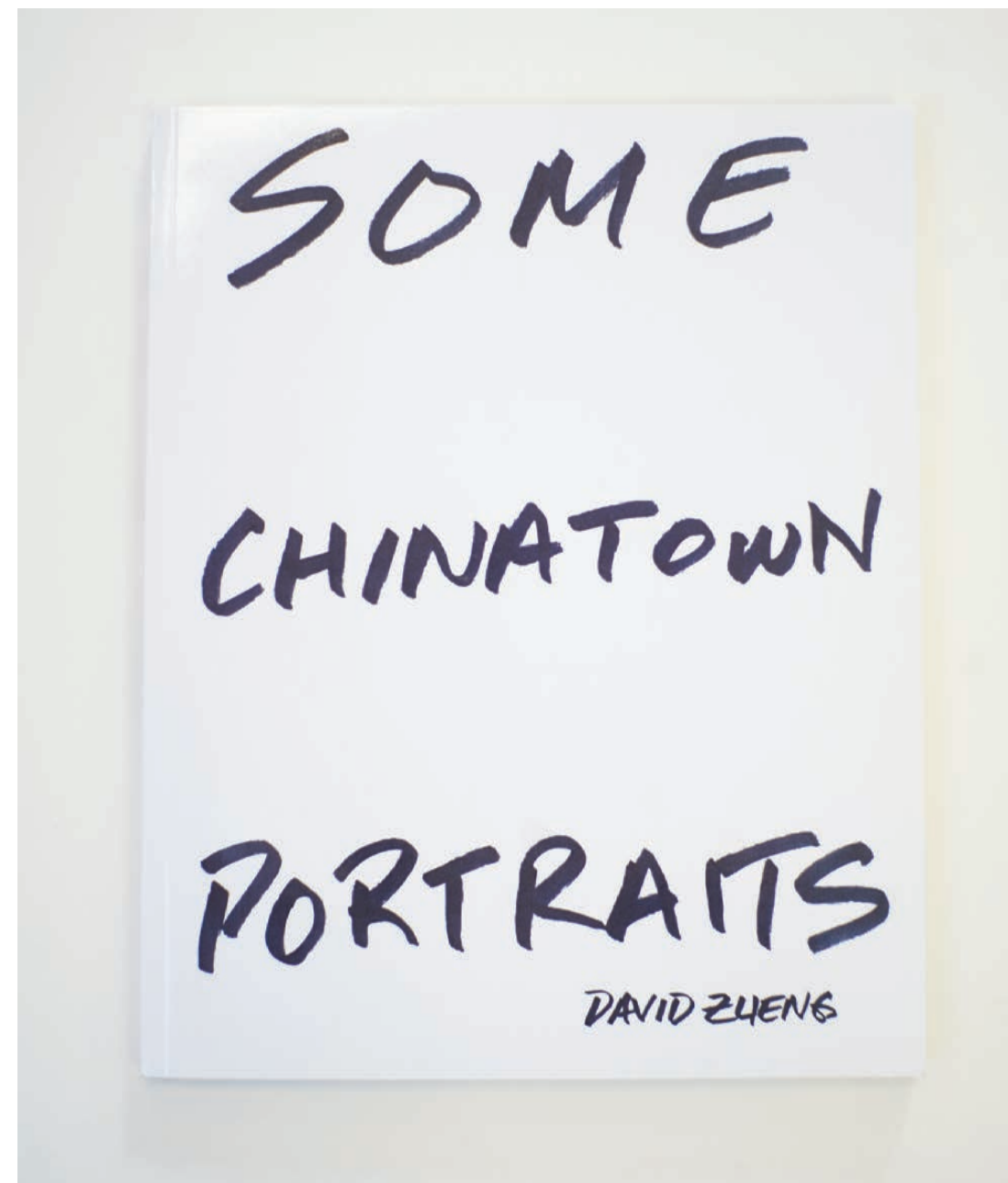
Russell Leung
Rising in the East, 2020
Ink on paper
5 x 4 inches



Siyon Wong
Gathering Ginko, 2020
Colored pencil on paper
14 x 11 inches



David Zheng
Some Chinatown Portraits, 2022
Digitally printed monograph
10 x 8 inches closed

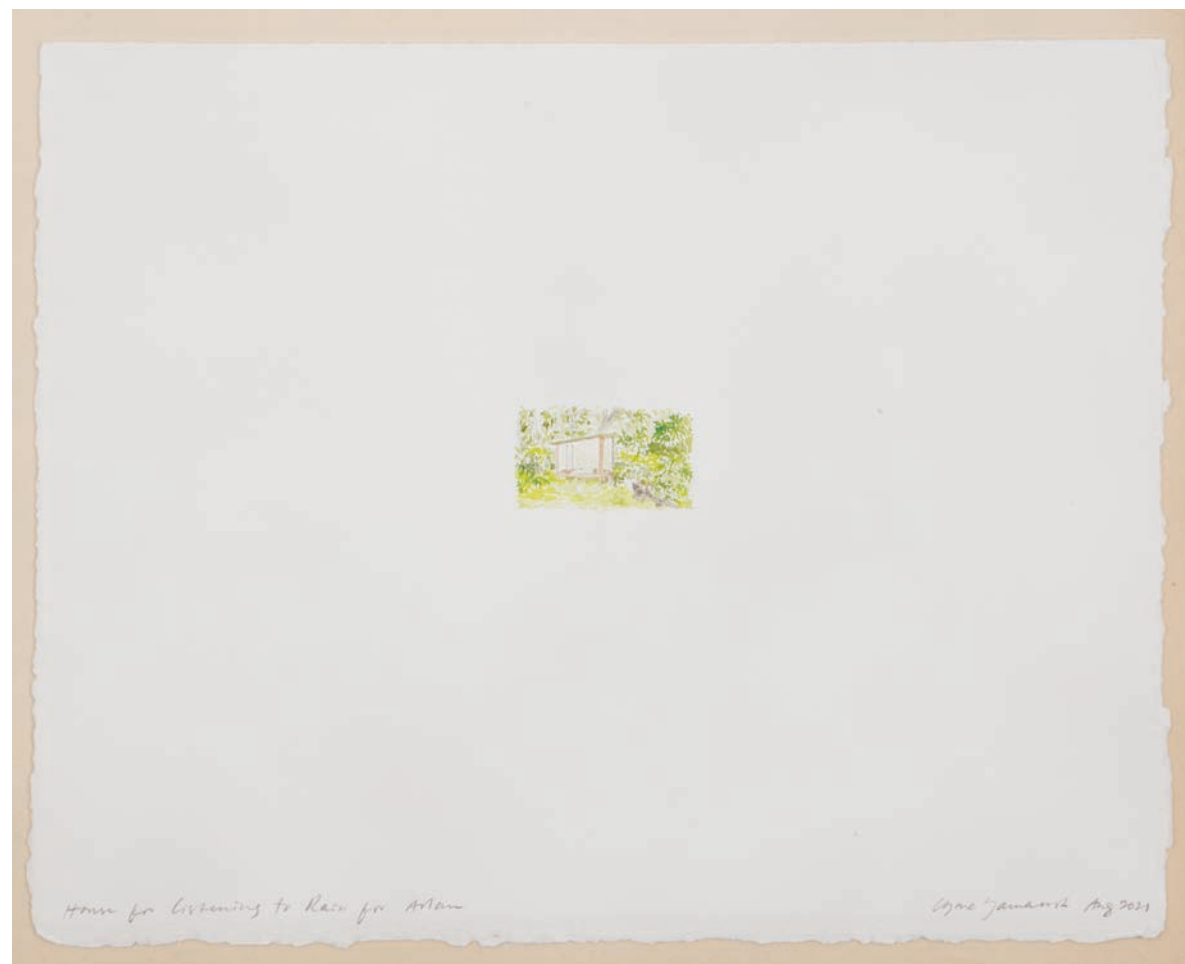


Cindy Trinh
Celebrate Chinatown, 2022
Digitally printed zine
8.25 x 5.25 inches



Edward Cheng
Rochelle Kwan 關凱瑤 as YiuYiu 瑤瑤, 2022
Silver gelatin print
8 x 10 inches





Lynne Yamamoto
House for Listening to Rain for Arlan, 2021
Watercolor on paper
12 x 14 inches



Lynne Yamamoto
House for Listening to Rain for Arlan (detail), 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many revelations have come about through the process of creating this show. I am forever grateful to Howie Chen and Danielle Wu for extending their patience with my antiquated views and delinquent technological skills. Thank you for challenging me.

My thanks to Cibebe Vieria and Edward Cheng for the great photography. Thank you, thank you to Gabrielle Chang for patiently working through our design insecurities. Your design is marvelous.

Two pillars of community integrity: Think!Chinatown and Pearl River Mart. Thank you Amy Chin and Yin Kong of T!C. Thank you Joanne Kwong and Angela Tung of PRM.

Decades before such a thing like Whole Foods even existed, I asked my mother, "Why do we need to shop in Chinatown?" She replied in Hoisan-wa, "bong chin ngin." It translates to, "We should support and help people by patronizing their businesses." Back then, Chinatown was all mom-and-pop. The neighborhood was small, and she knew everyone. In practice, she extended the meaning of this to be inclusive of all people. Her philoso-

phy extended to the family and each individual's social orbit. How did she spread her mantra? It was magic. It was some kind of ancient algorithm that she weaved through my San Francisco and New York families, all my friends, my art comrades, my fishing buddies, and everyone in between. I admit that I may have fallen short many times, but my family and friends never did. They supported me and always showed me the light when it was dark. To my kindergarten friends and my elder cohorts: I am forever thankful. To my family, mom and dad: my heart sighs with love.

I am grateful for the people who make up Squid Frames: Peter Chen, Fumiko Hasegawa, Karl Matsuda, and all the associates who have worked at the shop. A special thanks to Sam Fromartz for helping with quick favors.

My love to Lillian, Ray, and Joey for always being home. To my dad, Raymond, whom my mother called "a good man." To my mom, Florinda, who guided me as long as she could. Thank you.

My mom also said, "Don't play under the banquet table!" During those raucous Chinatown banquets, my cousin Kerwin and I would scurry under

the tables touching people's shoes and knees before the call to order. My mom would give me a look when she said, "Don't touch the gum!" Gum? Wow, there were a ton of gum wads all around the underside perimeter of the tables. Touching it, the gum was old and hard. I could not pick them off.

Upon surfacing and sitting on my seat listening to Chinese speeches, I couldn't help but imagine the gossiping grand aunts, the handsome uncles, the goofy nephews, nieces and cousins, moms and dads around our table discreetly taking their gum and squeezing it against the table. Many years and banquets later, opportunity arose. I chewed a fresh stick of gum till it was soft, took it out of my mouth, balled it with my fingers, and without looking, squeezed it against the underside of the table until it stuck. A rush of cosmic dust levitated my being. I was initiated. For my action, I felt awarded the gift of acceptance by the people above the table. I could laugh and applaud with them in unison. My voice became a part of the community. Thank you for letting me sit at the table. I hope to continue chewing on it.

To all the artists who have fought the hard battles on so many fronts: I am proud to be one of us. We have history. We stand on rich earth. Thank you, and I love you madly.



Top row (left to right): Keiko Ishii Eckhardt, Keigo Takahashi, Peter Chen, Ishitani Kaori, Arlan Huang, Suzuki Katsumi.

Bottom row (left to right): Satoko Kosugi, Tomomi Ono
Squid Frames, 168 7th Street, Brooklyn, NY, 2010.



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THINK!
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