



ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

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REVEALING THE DYNAMIC AND DIVERSE WORLD OF PHILADELPHIA'S CHINATOWN

A community-wide art exhibition uncovers a vibrant and dynamic ethnic enclave like you've never seen before

PHILADELPHIA, PA—August 1, 2005—For many people, Philadelphia's Chinatown has long been viewed as a place to get an occasional meal, odd groceries, and somewhat inexpensive souvenirs.

Yet Chinatown has long been far more than that. It has been, and still is, a cultural *mélange* filled with ethnic pride, long-standing churches, precious community values, and inspiration for artists. It has also been the location of controversy and debate as the City of Philadelphia, diverse communities, businesses and other interests have negotiated their way in, among, through and around the Chinatown district.

This complex and constantly evolving mix of qualities will be on display beginning October 21 and extending on through January 29, 2006, through *Chinatown In/flux*, an extensive, multi-site, multi-artist installation project produced by the Asian Arts Initiative, and supported by a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative. Seven Asian-American artists—Tomie Arai, Skowmon Hastanan, Mei-ling Hom, Hirokazu Kosaka, JiHyun Park, Jean Shin and Steve Wong—will show innovative work varying from an outdoor sculpture at 10th and Vine Streets, to woodblock prints made with local senior citizens, to custom-designed chinaware at a local restaurant.

The Asian Arts Initiative, a community arts center dedicated to providing a cultural and political voice for the Philadelphia Asian-American community, has chosen Chinatown as the focus for this landmark exhibition primarily because of the symbolic role that Chinatown plays within the Asian American community. Even the title of the exhibition, *Chinatown In/flux*, brings to the fore the idea that Chinatown has been constantly reborn as generation after generation of Asians, immigrants and others, find physical or cultural homes in this area of Center City Philadelphia.

Chinatown In/flux, too, signals the nature of the exhibition. The artists themselves and the work they will create center on ideas in artistic and geographic "flux." The artists come from distinct art communities around the country: Mei Ling Hom is from Philadelphia; Tomie Arai, Skowmon Hastanan, JiHyun Park, and Jean Shin are from New York, and Hirokazu Kosaka and Steve Wong are

from Los Angeles. The title also refers to Chinatown's constant flow of new immigrants, changing ethnic demographics, and the growth of the physical boundaries of the neighborhood, and references the project's intent to jar stereotypes of Chinatown as an "exotic" or monolithic tourist destination. Finally, *In/flux* represents the non-traditional curatorial process used for this exhibition, in which the Asian Arts Initiative has integrated expertise from the 'established' arts field with local community participation.

The Asian Arts Initiative chose the artists through an extensive participatory process involving curatorial advisors Melissa Chu, Ken Chu, Cynthia Lee, Edwin Ramoran and Eugenie Tsai, all of whom first visited Chinatown to better understand the nature of the community. Based on their findings, the curators recommended artists to participate in the exhibition, and the Asian Arts Initiative invited those artists and others through an open call process to come to Chinatown to meet with members of the community – from residents to businesspeople and beyond – to get a sense of what their works should accomplish.

The works in *In/flux* themselves represent the diverse ideas of art and community the artists found during their initial planning retreat and the time spent later with those from Chinatown. Kosaka's work, for instance, will be from workshops with Chinatown senior citizens, who drew maps of their childhood hometowns, which Kosaka then transferred to woodblock prints to be exhibited around Chinatown.

Hom's "Chinatown Eyes" will be a montage of sets of eyes of members of the Chinatown community. The images will be composed on a banner hung so it can be seen from the nearby Vine Street Expressway.

Wong's "The China Project" is a series of chinaware with images narrating stories he has gleaned from children and youth in the Chinatown community.

Shin's work will have eyeglass lenses and frames embedded into windows that provide insight into everyday scenes that might otherwise go unnoticed in the neighborhood.

Park will create a Philadelphia Chinatown map out of incense sticks and also cast hand-painted bonsai-like "Chicken and Broccoli" to be displayed at a local gift shop.

Hastanan's work will be a series of hanging crystal garlands with images and text depicting oral histories of the immigrant experience in Chinatown.

Arai's outdoor sculpture will be erected at 10th and Vine Streets, at the north end of Chinatown's commercial district and as a gateway to the future expansion of the neighborhood to "Chinatown North."

The Asian Arts Initiative also plans workshops and other educational programs to complement the *Chinatown In/flux* exhibition in its mission, and to demystify Chinatown as well as the diverse approaches to community-based art. There will be an opening celebration October 21 and 22, followed by guided tours, public symposia and a closing party on January 29, 2006.

For more information on *Chinatown In/flux*, contact the Asian Arts Initiative, 1315 Cherry Street, 2nd Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107, telephone (215) 557-0455 or visit www.chinatowninflux.org.

Participating Sites and Artists

Asian Arts Initiative, 1315 Cherry Street, 2nd Floor

Hirokazu Kosaka, *Ruin Map*

Jihyun Park, *Chinatown Map*

Steve Wong, *The China Project*

Vine Street Plaza, 10th and Vine Streets

Tomie Arai, *Swirl*

Serendipity Café, 1009 Arch Street

Skowmon Hastanan, *Tell Me a Story*

Vine Street Expressway, between 8th & 10 Streets

Mei-ling Hom, *Chinatown Eyes*

Shanghai Bazaar, 1016-18 Race Street

Hirokazu Kosaka, *Ruin Map*

Independence Branch of the Free Library, 18 South 7th Street

Hirokazu Kosaka, *Ruin Map*

China Art Company, 128-130 North 10th Street

Jihyun Park, *Chicken Broccoli*

New Tung Hop Chow Mein Noodles Co., Inc., 133 North 11th Street

Jean Shin, *Chinatown 20/20*

Rainbow Hair Styling Salon, 215 North 10th Street

Jean Shin, *Chinatown 20/20*

Office of Dr. Simon Su, 213 North 9th Street

Jean Shin, *Chinatown 20/20*

Imperial Inn Restaurant, 142–146 North 10th Street

Steve Wong, *The China Project*

Shiao Lan Kung, 930 Race Street

Steve Wong, *The China Project*

Major support for *Chinatown In/flux* has been provided by the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by The University of the Arts. Additional funding has been received from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, and the Samuel Fels Fund.

Created in response to community concerns about racial tension, the Asian Arts Initiative began programming in May 1993 with Philadelphia's first-ever Asian American Arts Festival: "Live Traditions/Contemporary Issues" at the Painted Bride Art Center. The Asian Arts Initiative has since expanded to become a community arts center that offers performances, exhibitions, workshops, and training for artists and everyday people who share our mission of community-based arts. We are grounded in the belief that all people have the right to creative expression, and that the arts can provide an important voice for Asian Americans and other groups whose lives and stories are marginalized in our society. As one of the very few Asian American community arts centers in the country, the Asian Arts Initiative is a unique and vital meeting place where artists and everyday people can think critically and creatively about the experiences of Asian Americans. For more information about the Asian Arts Initiative, call (215) 557-0455 or visit www.asianartsinitiative.org.

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