

In/Flux Tour

Introduction

Welcome to our tour of the *Chinatown In/Flux* Exhibition! My name is Joanne and I'm going to be your tour guide. *Chinatown In/Flux* is a visual art exhibit developed by the Asian Arts Initiative, a community arts organization. The exhibit opened September 23 and it closes on January 29 during the Chinese New Year. *Chinatown In/Flux* features seven Asian American artists who created site-specific installations in and about Philadelphia's Chinatown.

This exhibit is named *Chinatown In/Flux* for a number of reasons. In/Flux refers to Chinatown's constant flow of new immigrants, changing ethnic demographics, and the growth of the physical boundaries of the neighborhood. Through this project, we hope to jar stereotypes of Chinatown as just an 'exotic' tourist destination. The installations you see will show you perspectives of Chinatown not commonly seen by tourists. We hope that when you see these installations that you see Chinatown as a community made up of individuals who have experiences both different and similar to your own life's experiences.

This tour will last about an hour and a half. At every stop I will introduce you to the piece and then ask if you have any questions. Then I'll give you a few minutes to look at the installation. I will direct your attention to more points of interest as we walk from piece to piece. After the tour is over, I encourage you to come back to the Initiative to look at the *Chinatown In/Flux* sister show here in our gallery.

Chinatown Map, Jihyun Park, Asian Arts Initiative (1315 Cherry Street)

Here is the first In/Flux installation on the tour. This piece is called *Chinatown Map* by Jihyun Park. Jihyun Park is originally from South Korea, and he immigrated to the United States in the late nineties. He has drawn a lot from his own immigrant experience in his art by questioning the meanings of place, places we've come from, places we are now, and places we want to go to in the future. In this piece, Jihyun explores the meanings of the place Chinatown to the community that belongs to it.

Chinatown Map is an incense sculpture based on the actual layout and buildings found in Philadelphia's Chinatown. The map is in the shape of the Chinese character for "The Middle Kingdom" which refers to China. This character is a rectangle with a line through the middle. He used the line through the middle of the character to represent the Vine Street Expressway, a Philadelphia project which split Chinatown North from the rest of Chinatown. This character has many meanings to it including middle, important, inside and heart. *Chinatown Map* is meant to be a representation of the Chinatown community's center and heart.

Traditional red incense, burned to different lengths, was used here for *Chinatown Map*. In China and other parts of Asia, incense is used during ceremonies and is meant to contain people's desires or wishes. The incense used in *Chinatown Map* is meant to invoke the desires and wishes for Chinatown from the Chinatown Community.

Jihyun Park did a similar map project to *Chinatown Map* in New York called *Down Town*. *Down Town* was an incense map of Manhattan suspended upside down as a play on the words 'down town'. Jihyun describes this project as one of his "twisted language works" inspired by his immigrant experiences. We have another one of his twisted language works on this tour that we will encounter later in a bonsai shop.

Asian Arts Initiative

I just want to give you some more information about this installation's site, the Asian Arts Initiative. The Asian Arts Initiative is 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. *Chinatown In/Flux* is one among many projects we've done to capture people's stories through the arts. A project similar to In/Flux is our Chinatown Oral History Project. Our *Chinatown Live(s)* book resulted from this project. (pass a copy of the book around) Later in this tour you'll see images and text from *Chinatown Live(s)* in an installation in a cafe.

Chinatown History (when walking toward *China Wedge*)

Founded in 1681 by William Penn, Philadelphia was originally a port city, strategically located between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers. In the nineteenth century, this area of the city really developed into an industrial neighborhood. Large factories and warehouses replaced individual homes. The remnants of these buildings are still visible in the Chinatown area.

At first, this area mostly had British owned residential homes. By 1850 more and more factories were built and the British moved westward. Irish and German immigrants moved in to replace them. Commercial loft buildings and row houses replaced private homes. The area then began to deteriorate and from 1870 –1890 it became known as the 'city's 'tenderloin' district known for its burlesque theaters, hotels, and rooming houses'.

***China Wedge*, Mei-ling Hom 1994, Pennsylvania Convention Center (seen on Arch between 12th and 13th)**

This is *China Wedge* by Mei-ling Hom. This is not part of the In/Flux exhibition, but the artist Mei-ling Hom did create a piece for In/Flux – so we thought we would stop and show one of her other pieces in Philadelphia. *China Wedge* is a 40-foot long sculpture comprised of 22,000 Chinese cups, bowls and spoons wedged into a space under an escalator. The Arch Street Concourse of the Pennsylvania Convention Center commissioned Mei-ling Hom to create *China Wedge*.

More information on *China Wedge*:

Mei-ling Hom choose to do a sculpture under the escalator because Chinese immigrants often are forced into undesirable places because of restricted resources or racism, and through extremely hard work and perseverance they turn these places into thriving communities. Chinatown was once a neighborhood that was overlooked by the City of Philadelphia as an undesirable place, and the Chinese immigrants turned this seedy neighborhood into the center for their community with restaurants, shops, grocery stores, and services such as doctor's offices and schools.

We've stopped here to let you see *China Wedge* and to take a moment to talk about urban renewal projects affecting Chinatown's borders since the Convention Center is a major one. The Convention Center is represents the largest public construction project undertaken in the state of Pennsylvania. Built 12 years ago, the Convention Center is one of several major urban renewal projects that have taken land from Chinatown and prevented it from expanding on three sides. Chinatown is hemmed in by the Gallery (a mall) to it's south, Independence Mall to its east, and the Convention Center to its west. Altogether Chinatown has lost over one quarter of its land, housing and commercial stock to these major projects.

More Chinatown History (when walking toward Serendipity)

Let's talk now a little bit about the development of Chinatown. We mentioned that this area became a seedy neighborhood during the second half of the nineteenth century. Church records indicate that the Chinese occupation in this area began during this time period as early as 1845. In 1870, Lee Fong opened the first laundry at 913 Race Street. A decade later his cousin opened the first restaurant on the floor above the laundry. Factory owners began recruiting Chinese from the West coast to come work in their factories, sometimes as strike breakers. With the influx of more immigrants into this area, laundries, restaurants, and eventually grocery stores began to be opened by Chinese. By 1890 this section of Center City was inhabited by approximately 700 Chinese and it became widely known as Philadelphia's Chinatown.

Most residents of Chinatown were originally from Canton, and almost all were men. Immigration law at this time prohibited Chinese women from entering the US to prevent more permanent, family-based communities from forming. Most Chinese came to the United States intending to be sojourners, people who came to work for a few years with plans to return to China eventually. In fact, the first Chinese woman to Philadelphia came not as a settler but as an exhibit. In 1835 19-year old Afong Moy came and amazed crowds by speaking in Chinese and eating with chopsticks!

Within the last century, the population of Chinatown has grown to approximately 4000 residents and this number continues to increase. The latest wave of immigration has come from the Fujian province in China. This area also has a significant presence from the Southeast Asian Community. The area now known as Chinatown in Philadelphia is located in Center City near the Delaware River and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge. Its borders are generally thought to be Arch street in the south, 8th street in the east, and 13th street in the west.

Trocadero (1003 Arch Street)

Trocadero used to be a burlesque hall (11th and Arch)! By the way, the Chinese settled in Chinatown because it's what they could afford and it's where Philadelphia would let them live. Racism kept them out of most other neighborhoods. Since they did live in this seedier part of town, they were associated with the illegal activities here. According to newspaper articles from that time, Chinatown had a reputation as a mysterious place, lawless and dangerous. As a bachelor society full of opium, prostitutes, and deathly night fights that ended with bodies dumped in the Delaware. These writers in general described the Chinese in a very uninformed way. Who knows how dangerous Chinatown really was.

Tell Me a Story, Skowman Hastanan, Serendipity Café (1009 Arch Street)

This *Chinatown In/Flux* installation is called *Tell Me a Story* by Skowmon Hastanan. Skowmon Hastanan immigrated from Thailand, and much of her work has to do with immigrant experiences. She created *Tell Me a Story* because she wanted to capture moments from the life stories of Chinatown community residents.

Tell Me a Story is a sculpture of garlands made from chandelier crystals and beads. These garlands are suspended from Serendipity Café's entrance to capture and be illuminated by natural light. Skowmon Hastanan strategically inserted hand-colored images and text inside the crystals to create garland immigration stories. These were taken from the Asian Arts Initiative's *Chinatown Live(s)* book (we saw a copy at the Initiative). *Chinatown Live(s)* is a collection of oral histories from Philadelphia's Chinatown. Documentary photographer Rodney Atenza took the photographs for *Chinatown Live(s)* that you see used in this piece.

In a broader sense, *Tell Me a Story* is about journeys in general, about going from one place to another. And not just immigration journeys. According to Skowmon Hastanan, this journey can be “physical or spiritual.” She explains, “We’re all always on a journey, we’re all going somewhere, we’re always changing.” Once again on this tour, I ask you to look at this piece to see experiences of residents of Chinatown with new insights but to also think about journeys from your own life.

Serendipity Café

Josephine Wong and Cindy Lee opened Serendipity Café in 2002. Both women are from China, and Josephine Wong also owns popular dim sum restaurant Ocean Harbor. Many of Serendipity’s patrons are from outside of Chinatown. They come for the Japanese and pan-Asian food, and for Serendipity’s great bar!

Friendship Gate (10th and Arch Streets) 1984

The Friendship Gate was built as an exchange between Philadelphia and its sister city in China, Tianjin. Artisans from China built this gate, and local architect and Chinatown community member Sabrina Soong helped with the architecture. The colors yellow, blue, red, and green represent traditional Chinese color combinations often used in imperial construction. Graphic patterns use themes of mythical creatures from the Ming and Qing dynasties such as the phoenix and the dragon.

Chicken Broccoli, Jihyun Park, China Art Company (128-130 N. 10 Street)

This piece is *Chicken Broccoli* by Jihyun Park. *Chicken Broccoli* consists of twenty figures of bonsai-like broccolis with chickens. We saw Jihyun Park’s other piece *Chinatown Map* at our first stop. At that time, we mentioned that Park is an immigrant from Korea. Park explains that he has had to learn English as a second language, and dealing with the challenge of a language barrier has made him an alien and given him a new perspective on a lot of things. As he learned English, he was inspired to create art that deals with word plays, his self-described ‘twisted language works’. *Chicken Broccoli* is one of these twisted language works. *Chicken Broccoli* reflects the irony that chicken broccoli, a staple on Chinese takeout menus across the United States, is mistakenly thought to be “Chinese” food. In fact, much that is found on the Chinese takeout menu, including chicken broccoli, was actually invented here in the West and will not be found in China.

The figures in *Chicken Broccoli* are cast from resin and hand-painted with great detail. In *Chicken Broccoli*, Jihyun Park uses realistic representations of food and animals to create an imaginary world. With the tiny chickens and the bonsai broccolis, he creates an alternative Chicken Broccoli which is a word play and a parody of real life. He also created *Chicken Broccoli* because he wanted his installation to fit in a natural setting in Chinatown. *Chicken Broccoli* is a distortion and a parody, but it points to the very real distorted and limited perspective with which many Americans see Chinatown specifically and Asian Americans generally.

The China Project, Steve Wong 2005, Imperial Inn (146 N. 10 Street) and Shiao Lan Kung (930 Race Street)

This next piece is *The China Project* by Steve Wong. Steve Wong is based out of Los Angeles’ Chinatown, a place that sees a lot of tourists. From living in L.A.’s Chinatown, he became interested in how a community adapts to having their neighborhood viewed as an exotic place for tourists to visit. For *Chinatown In/Flux*, Steve Wong decided that he wanted to do a piece

that would represent a perspective of Philadelphia's Chinatown that is not usually sold to tourists.

To do this, he solicited hand written and hand drawn impressions, stories, and memories from the local Chinatown community. He also gathered impressions of Chinatown from people who do not consider themselves members of the Chinatown community. Then he incorporated these diverse perspectives onto 8 custom plate designs, and the restaurant and its patrons use these plates as ordinary chinaware. Steve Wong wanted to do an installation in restaurant in Chinatown because he knows that the restaurants are a very important part of Chinatown's economy. However, his plates interject glimpses of another layer of the Chinatown community not readily seen in restaurants.

The China Project challenges us to see the relationships between the exoticized Chinatown (the restaurants and tourist shops) and the rest of Chinatown (the lives of the workers and owners or the restaurants and shops, the banks, doctor's offices, homes, and churches) so that we can have a deeper understand of this community.

Imperial Inn: Daniel Law owns Imperial Inn. His parents immigrated from Hong Kong and opened this restaurant as a family business in 1973. Mr. Law currently is the only family member running the business. The food is 80% Hong Kong cuisine and 20% from mainland China. According to Mr. Law, about half his customers are from Chinatown and the other half come from out of town – many of them are here for events at the Convention Center.

Shiao Lan Kung: We are near to the site of the first Chinatown business – Lee Fong's laundry at 913 Race Street. Actually, some the first Chinese immigrants to this coast were brought from China to work in laundries. Many Chinese immigrated to California, thinking that America would be a *Gim San* or "Gold Mountain," a place with endless opportunities. Instead, they faced pervasive racism and ended up in jobs that other men would not take, such as working in laundries and restaurants. It's no coincident that the first businesses in Philadelphia's Chinatown were a laundry and then a restaurant!

***Chinatown 20/20*, Jean Shin 2005, Rainbow Hair Styling Salon (215 N. 10 Street), New Tung Hop Chow Mein Noodles Company (133 N. 11 Street), Office of Dr. Simon Su (213 N. 9 Street)**

This is *Chinatown 20/20* by Jean Shin. Jean Shin attached panels embedded with prescription eyeglass lenses and frames to existing storefronts. She chose locations for *Chinatown 20/20* in spaces typically overlooked by visitors to Chinatown. The framed lenses create small glass peepholes in the wall that simultaneously focus and refract the vision that lay beyond the wall into the interior of the building. People inside the building can also use these peepholes to see the world outside too. Let's take a moment for you to look through the peepholes. Jean Shin explains, "the installation is very much about the many individual 'insights' into Chinatown and consequently how this collective vision brings Chinatown into focus."

Information on the site:
Rainbow Hair Salon:

New Tung Hop Chow Mein Noodles Company, Inc: This is the oldest noodle factory in Philadelphia. A noodle factory already existed in this building when the current owner's father and Yat Long Ip took over the factory in 1977. Now, Yat Long Ip owns the factory with Peter Chang, his original partner's son. The factory operates year round even though there is no heat (flour is combustible). Workers arrive at the factory at 4:00 in the morning and work six days a

week. This factory sells to the tri-state area with buyers from as far away as Harrisburg. Most of the workers live in Philadelphia, but the owners moved from Philadelphia to live in West Chester and New Jersey.

Office of Dr. Simon Su: Dr. Simon Su has been treating patients in this office for six years now. An immigrant from China himself, Dr. Su's practice is one of the few places where Chinese-speaking people can get health care in their native language. His patient list has over 7000 names on it, attesting to the real need for his practice. Most of his patients come from Chinatown, but he does have some from outside of the city.

Swirl, Tomie Arai 2005
10th and Vine Street Plaza

Introduction:

Tomie Arai's installation, "Swirl" is a visual portal between Chinatown proper and Chinatown North. Located in the Vine Street Plaza in the middle of the Vine Street Expressway, the installation marks the changing boundaries of Chinatown. Tomie Arai wanted to do a piece that would point to Chinatown North and that would reference the impact the Vine Street Expressway has had on Chinatown. By putting a piece of public art in this plaza in particular, Tomie Arai joined local plans to make this a gateway for Chinatown North. In developing the concept for her piece, Arai worked collaboratively with members of the Chinatown community, the staff of the Asian Arts Initiative and the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC). In fact, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation has plans to develop this plaza into a more inviting space.

"Swirl" is a circular disc, 10' in diameter, constructed of MDO plywood and silkscreened with images of Chinatown. The disc is held up by a steel frame and reinforced by a cement base. Arai conducted a series of open workshops with the community to collect images for her installation. Working closely with photographer Rana Sindhikara and youth from the Asian Arts Initiative's Summer Youth Arts Workshop, the artist created a series of portraits of the community, which were translated into silkscreens and printed on the surface of the installation.

The installation takes the shape of a large sphere based on the jade Bi or disc traditionally worn by the Chinese as a pendant or talisman. Originating as far back as the Han dynasty, the jade bi has been regarded as a symbol of power and spiritual strength. Known as the stone of Heaven, jade is said to deepen in color the longer a person wears it. Arai will silkscreen images of local residents onto the surface of her installation in layers of green and gold, to create an overlapping cityscape; a deepening swirl of change and flux that reflects the urban environment and the unique history of Philadelphia's Chinatown.

PCDC is located near to here (point towards the east). They were actually born from community organizing against the city's plans to build this expressway, the Vine Street Expressway, right through Holy Redeemer Church and School. This space is the first school in Chinatown, the only playground, and the only large community space with its gym and cafeteria. After winning the battle to change plans for the expressway so that the school would be saved, PCDC has continued fighting for the Chinatown community by working with residents to oppose the city's plans to build a baseball stadium in Chinatown. PCDC has also steadily worked to build over 200 affordable housing units and over 40 commercial units for Chinatown. This is very important for a community that is 80% low-income with many families and children (some say 3 out of 4) living at poverty level.

Chinatown Eyes/Chinatown-ize/Chinatown I's, Mei-ling Hom 2005
East Wall of 1011 Vine Street rowhouse
60' by 30'

Chinatown Eyes (spell or point to 'eyes')/*Chinatown-ize* (spell 'ize')/*Chinatown I's* (spell 'I's') is located at the future site of Chinatown's community center. This building used to house a family whose business was making floats for mummies' parades. (Is everyone familiar with the Mummies Parade? For those of you who aren't from Philadelphia, the Mummies Parade on New Years day is a huge tradition in Philadelphia involving really elaborate floats and costumes. It's actually based on an ancient Roman tradition and the Greek god Momus – god of mockery) The eyes you see on the banner are photographs of people from the Chinatown community. According to Mei-ling Hom, *Chinatown Eyes* "creates a symbolic wall of Chinatown eyes looking out onto this historic locus of Asian settlement in Philadelphia, while asserting Chinatown's place in the future of Philadelphia's cultural vitality."

I want to talk a little bit about why this site will become the Chinatown Community Center. This community center is part of a much larger development initiative of PCDC's. PCDC is very much aware of the development projects threatening Chinatown. This community is being pushed out of Chinatown Proper. Instead, developers are building quarter million dollar condos in a neighborhood where many families survive on not quite \$9000 a year. There's no way the families who live here will be able to afford increased taxes because their proper value rises because they are next to multimillion dollar condo buildings.

This area north of the Vine Street Expressway is mostly abandoned warehouses, vacant lots, other buildings associated with industrial uses. PCDC has worked with the city to rezone land here so that it could be used for residential neighborhoods with Spring Garden at the northern border of Chinatown North. The Chinatown Community is starting to buy land here to build residential properties. PCDC hopes that the development of large Chinatown Community Center will serve as a catalyst for the area surrounding it and that Chinatown will want to build businesses and homes and around the Center. They believe that moving Chinatown's Center to the north is the only way to save Chinatown.

Ruin Map, Hirokazu Kosaka 2005
24" by 24" wood block print on handcrafted paper made from fibers from *mitsu mata*, a Japanese reed.

Here we see *Ruin Map* by Hirokazu Kosaka. Hirokazu Kosaka was born in Japan and is now based in Los Angeles, California. In addition to being a trained artist he is also a Buddhist priest and a master Zen archer. He first got his idea for *Ruin Map* when he remembered doing a similar mapping project in third grade. His teacher told his class to ask their grandparents to draw a detailed map depicting their childhood memory of their hometown. The teacher received over thirty maps from the class and pasted them all onto the blackboard. Some of the drawings dated back 60 years. Kosaka and the other children noticed how the landscape had changed. Kosaka reflected that life is impermanent and that changes take place everyday.

Kosaka has recreated this project by working directly with seniors, first in Los Angeles and now in Philadelphia. He describes *Ruin Map* as "a collaborative effort between the Chinatown people, [himself], the printer, and the paper maker." Here in Philadelphia, Kosaka conducted workshops with Chinatown seniors at On Lok House Social Service Center, asking them to draw a simple map of their childhood town. The map drawings were collected and transferred

into large wood block prints. These prints were assembled into a book and are displayed in various Chinatown community spaces.

Kosaka says that his work fits into In/Flux because his greater body of work is very personal. A lot of his work does not belong to galleries or any museum, it belongs to the heart of community. These maps, exhibited in Chinatown, ask for us to see similarities and differences – compare the maps to each other, compare them to your own childhood neighborhoods, and compare them to residential neighborhoods now. According to Kosaka, the maps have an unfinished feel to them to leave viewers with room to remember their own childhoods.

We'll take a couple minutes now to let you view the maps.

The Sites:

On Lok House was developed by the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation and opened in 1984 to provide Section 8 low cost apartments to seniors. Since then, On Lok House has expanded its roles and now it provides a variety of social services through partnerships with other organizations. For example, the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging helps some residents who have restricted mobility. The lunch program, planned social activities, and other social services provided at On Lok House draw Asian seniors from all over Philadelphia and even into the suburbs. Many seniors choose to live in On Lok House because they value the convenience of living in Chinatown. Some are alone in Philadelphia because they could not bring their families when they immigrated to the United States. Others prefer living in Chinatown because they do not know English very well.

Lilly Fiehong Song opened Shanghai Bazaar in 2005. Originally a school teacher from southeastern China, she immigrated to the United States and opened the bookstore and cyber café called New China Book Store at 1010 Race St. Both the book store and Shanghai Bazaar are part of 1010 Race Condominium building which used to be Clarion Hotel. Ms. Song opened Shanghai Bazaar to sell quality Asian goods including traditional arts and crafts porcelain, handmade gifts, and musical instruments.

The Independence Branch of the Free Library was opened in 2000. This building used to house the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies. From the beginning, the Independence Branch of the Free Library's mission included serving the Chinatown community. The library supervisor here is Jennifer Chang, and she has been working here for the Independence Branch since it opened, but she's been with the Free library for 15 years. She has helped to develop a Chinese interest section here with over 3000 including books, videos, and newspapers. This library is heavily used in general (it's high circulation rate puts it in the top three out of 55 branches), and the Chinese interest section is really seen as a resource center. Chinese Americans use it to learn how to open a business and read the news. The library also functions as a community center. It provides meeting space for ESL classes, Tai Chi, and other community groups.

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

History of Chinatown, Arturo Ho, Giz, N. Phung, H. Tran 1996

10th and Winter Streets

- Painted to commemorate the 125th anniversary of Chinatown. You can see immigration stories in the mural. Look at the first laundry business and...

Colors of Light, Josh Sarantitis 2000

12th and Vine Streets

- The Asian Arts Initiative, along with other organizations sponsored this mural. The model for the woman's face on the right side is Gayle Isa, the executive director of the Asian Arts Initiative.