



NEWS RELEASE

February 2, 1994

For Immediate Release

Press release on art exhibition:

Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 1

February 3 - April 20, 1994

Museum Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 11-4
Wednesday evening 6-8
Saturday 11-2
Before selected Flint Center events

Reception: Wednesday, March 9, 6-8

Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 1 presents works by artists who are immigrants to the United States, most since 1980, and who now live in the San Francisco Bay Area. Included are works by artists from Argentina, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, Iran, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Taiwan, Turkey, and Vietnam. *Part 2* will be presented in fall 1994.

Coming Across speaks of a U.S. culture constantly challenged and renewed, in part through the richly varied influence of these artists. It also raises psychological, historical, and socio-anthropological issues. Among these are the conditions under which art is produced; issues of trauma, the journey, and cultural influences; artists' and immigrants' communities; and ways in which artists influence our notions of history, ethnicity, and diversity. Woven throughout is the notion of immigration as a paradigm for the human experience when seen in terms of such issues as continual change, shifting identities, and homelessness.

The exhibition reflects immigrants' continuing attraction to the San Francisco Bay Area. Through art schools, museums, community groups, and simple geographic proximity, artists in our area find opportunities to communicate and collaborate.

Coming Across brings together works, from traditional to "cutting edge," in various media (drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, installation, mixed-media). In some artworks, the experiences of immigration are represented or interpreted directly. In others, they are submerged into form, craft, technique, style, or gesture.

Part 1 includes artworks which viewers might examine in light of the questions "How do you relate to your country of origin?" and "Who are you now?"

Curators are Jan Rindfleisch and Patricia Albers. The exhibition is the result of a multi-year collaboration between the Euphrat Museum of Art and The Bronx Museum of the Arts.

The exhibition and public program at the Euphrat Museum are supported by a grant from Apple Computer, Inc. The National Endowment for the Arts, Metropolitan Life Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation provided underwriting for the joint project.

Introduction

Coming Across, Part 1 begins with a poster from *Silent Voice (I Have Something To Say)*, a photo-installation by **Su-Chen Hung** and **Gigi Janchang** (Taiwan). In 1993, it was presented on kiosks up and down San Francisco's Market Street. Each kiosk displayed one of twelve life-sized, full-length portraits of immigrants from different countries. Each immigrant wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase "I have something to say" in his or her native language.

Seyed Alavi's postcard installation *There is No Place Like Here*, located near the front door, has both a "point-of-sale" and artwork feel. Inspired by the saying "There is no place like home," it questions the concepts of "home" and "homeland." If anywhere is "here," does everywhere become "home?" Is home where you live or where you come from? For the immigrant it is both and neither. This is true also for many other people in today's rapidly shifting mental and physical landscapes.

How do you relate to your country of origin?

Some artwork connects to the country of origin by way of "telling one's story." Other art connects by including found objects from the country of origin or elements of one's native language, or by utilizing an artistic language from the homeland.

Most of the artists of Tamoanchan tell a story of their homeland. Tamoanchan is the name recently adopted by a group of artists, almost all from El Salvador. The group grew out of workshops conducted by artist Claudia Bernardi for political refugees from Latin America. In **Carlos Cartagena's** monotype *The Remains of a Story*, a levitating dog eats burial candles. His art stems from memories of his youth and of war in El Salvador: "Dogs are the sole witnesses of massacres." **Victor Cartagena's** artworks have a glow from another world — for example hearts that glow in the body and have a life of their own outside the body, as in *Los Amantes (The Lovers)*. For **Martivon Galindo**, nightmarish, dark, and fearful images are recurring, also images of duality, cracking, breaking. Other artists from Tamoanchan (**Fidelina Aguilar-Peña**, **Próspero Callejas**, **Manuel De Paz**, **Joaquin Dominguez-Perada**, **Benedicto Zavala**, **Carmelo Zavala**, **Daniel Zavala**, **José Antonio Zavala**, **Reinaldo Zavala**) exhibit linocuts with smaller formats based on "Memories in the Tips of our Fingers." **Claudia Bernardi**, who experienced the undeclared war in Argentina in the late '70s, has close ties with both Argentina and El Salvador, through a sister in Argentina and many Salvadorian friends. Bernardi's heavily pigmented monotypes are influenced by her work with the Argentine Team on the exhumations of the massacre of El Mozote, in El Salvador.

Several artists use language from their country of origin in their artwork. **Wosene Kosrof**, who immigrated to the U.S. from Ethiopia, employs the Amharic alphabet in *The Fortune Teller*; Amharic is the dominant language in Ethiopia. **Sandra Sunnyo Lee**, from Korea, collaged pages from a Chinese fortune telling book onto her three-dimensional painting, *New Year Resolution*. **Taraneh Hemami**, from Iran, looks into her three thousand year old heritage, Islamic upbringing, and family relationships: "My paintings are often of my sisters, parents, grandmother, myself [when I was young], with ceremonial lights, carpet patterns, writings."

In terms of artistic language, **Victor Mario Zaballa's** altar *Ollin Yolixtli (Life and Movement)* is based on the religious *altar* tradition in Mexico, crowned with a traditional canopy of *papel picado* (cut paper designs); it refers back to his childhood home near Mexico City. "I try to achieve Toltecayotl, the Toltec synthesis of art, science, spirituality, and social consciousness." **Joanna Salska** has ties to Poland both through one of her artforms, tapestry, and the fact that *Moonlight Rendezvous* was woven in Warsaw. The subject matter is related to the human journey, and to a haunted nighttime image of Highway 5, which runs through the central valley of California.

Who are you now?

Artwork also touches on issues of shifting identities, of seeing and being seen from many points of view. Many immigrants speak of being neither "there" nor "here," but "in-between" cultures. Many relate not only to one or more cultures in their countries of origin and U.S. cultures, but also to cultures in one or more other countries where they have studied or lived.

Enrique Chagoya, in his series *Tales from the Conquest/Codex*, uses the form of a pre-Columbian codex, collaging together ancient pictographs with comic book heroes and reproductions of famous Spanish paintings. "You develop a critical standpoint to both countries... and suddenly you become a different person, like a person from a country which does not exist, has nothing to do with geopolitical boundaries... I am part of a dominated culture and a dominating culture."

Canan Tolon's artwork often includes grass (grown from seed right on the canvas), coffee grounds, various measurement systems including maps and clothes patterns, and images related to Turkey's minorities. Tolon, born in Turkey, raised in France, reflects: "Immigration has been the whole of my life. I can't say I'm homesick, because I don't have a country... I identify with people who have come to the States and cannot go back... This is an identity change... Maps, borders, measurements, microscopes — [in my art] I work on things which help you look at the world. For many of us, there are no maps to relate to, and we don't belong to one language."

At age eleven, **Vi Ly** fled Vietnam in a boat with nearly 600 people. Fuel and food ran out; pirates appeared. In Ly's large charcoal drawing, *Disillusioned*, the anchor is the most visible object. "It's facing up and not down. It's like people who throw down anchors without knowing where they are going, where they are, land where you will." "The immigration experience shows in my work... When I first started doing my work, I couldn't talk about my own immigration experience, so I talked about everyone else's."

Rahel Fikre-Selassie left Ethiopia as a political refugee sixteen years ago. She is interested in understanding herself through the lives of Ethiopian women and a heritage of Coptic Christianity. Her abstract paintings suggest prayer shawls, rock-hewn churches, and other natural and human-made forms associated with Ethiopian cultures.

Saiman Li is interested in identity, memory, and displacement. Much of his artwork is self-portraiture. Li feels an uneasy disconnection from images of his own previous life. *Memoirs* was inspired by finding, in his San Francisco closet, a box of old family photographs, most taken in Hong Kong.

Rudjen Roldan's *Shovel*, created with plaster, wax, and a real shovel, includes parts of the body and a small house. "*Shovel* is a digging up and burying, an acknowledgment of fragmentation and an attempt at piecing together. It has clumps of earth and an archeological feeling related to roots, in some sense to excavating the self."

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The exhibition is the result of a multi-year collaboration between the Euphrat Museum of Art and The Bronx Museum of the Arts. The exhibition at the Bronx Museum, presented concurrently, is called *Beyond the Borders: Art by Recent Immigrants*; it examines art by recent immigrants who live in the greater New York area. The exhibitions were developed in collaboration with a national advisory committee including scholars, artists, immigration specialists, and art historians. Members include: Cecilia Burciaga, Associate Dean, Stanford University, Stanford, CA; José Antonio Burciaga, Artist and Writer, Stanford, CA; Enrique Chagoya, Artist and Curator, Berkeley, CA; Margi Dunlap, Associate Director, International Institute of San Francisco; Mulugeta Gerefá, Director, Ethiopian Refugee Resettlement Center, San Francisco, CA; Dr. Judy Goddess, Education Consultant, San Francisco, CA; Fritz Joseph, Executive Director, Cross Section: African American and Caribbean Fine Arts, Inc., New York, NY; Bing Lee, Artist and Chinese Art Student Program Coordinator, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY; Lydia Mathews, Art Historian and Professor, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA; Salwa Nashashibi, Executive Director, International Council for Women in the Arts, Walnut Creek, CA; Lan Ngan, Indo-Chinese Resettlement Specialist, International Rescue Committee, New York, NY; Dr. Laura Nader, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley; Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, Professor, The American University, Washington, D.C.; Mark Ong, Artist and Board Member, International Institute of San Francisco; Ruben Quiroz, Executive Director, Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights, New York, NY; Dr. Saskia Sassen, Professor of Urban Planning, Columbia University, New York; Estelle Strizhak, Immigration Specialist, International Rescue Committee, New York; and John Tenhula, President, The Balch Institute, Philadelphia. Additional assistance was provided by Luis Cancel, Marilyn Day, Betti-Sue Hertz, Mark Knego, Andrew Lam, Sonia Melnikova, Juanita Meza Velásquez, Tsedal Mulugetta, Long Nguyen, Trinh Nguyen, Rebecca Rothfusz, Vincenza Scarpaci, Loida Sorenson, Frederick Spratt, Grace C. Stanislaus, Philip Verre, Carlos Villa, Lydia Yee.

The public is invited to a reception to meet the artists on Wednesday, March 9, 6-8. The event will take place at the Euphrat Museum of Art and is free-of-charge. The Euphrat is wheelchair accessible.

Press photographs are available.

For more information or to schedule group tours, please call (408)864-8836.

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Contact: Jan Rindfleisch (408)864-8836