



NEWS RELEASE

January 21, 2001

For Immediate Release

Press release on art exhibition:

***Angel Island and Immigration Stories of the 20th and 21st Centuries:
Drama, Contradictions, New Neighbors, Coalitions***

Artists:

José Arenas, Edith Argabrite, Alma Lopez, Rick Rocamora, Flo Oy Wong

February 22 - April 19, 2001

Closed March 31 and April 14

Museum Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 11-4; Tuesday evening 6-8; Saturday 11-2.
Open to tour groups by appointment.

Reception: Tuesday, March 6, 6-8, reception with artist presentation

Panel discussion: "Stories from Angel Island and Other Histories of Chinese Immigration,"
Thursday, March 1, 2001, Hinson Campus Center, Conference Room B

Family Day: Saturday, April 7, 12-3. Hands-on activities (for all ages) and performances.

Angel Island and Immigration Stories of the 20th and 21st Centuries presents artwork and stories with roots in the 20th century and ramifications in the 21st century, particularly in light of the New California, the New Economy. The art reveals human drama. Contradictions arise, for example the contrast between the beautiful setting of Angel Island and what happened there. We see interactions of new neighbors, how they build community. The work covers installation, painting, documentary photography, digital images, and mixed media.

Flo Oy Wong presents a major installation, *made in usa: Angel Island Shhh*, which explores the identity secrets of Chinese immigrants detained and interrogated in the U.S. For her installation Wong has hand sewn rice sacks onto U.S. flags, then added sequins and stenciled words relating to the interrogation experience of detainees and descendants of detainees. Audiotapes of interviews and related books and materials are also available. Wong's parents, her three older sisters, and her husband's mother, brother, and uncle entered the U. S. via the Angel Island Immigration Station. They were all interrogated under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. First her father entered as a "son of a native," and then her mother came as his "paper sister" (wives were

excluded). The act barred legal entry of Chinese laborers, reflecting anti-Chinese sentiment during difficult economic times. The exhibition honors "paper people," their sponsors, and those who entered the U.S. with them — people who have lived with shame and fear of discovery. Wong would like the stories to be heard and for healing to occur. As an activist, she joins with others who would like the Immigration Station (in use 1910-1940) to be elevated to a national immigration museum as sort of a bookend to the impressive Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York harbor which served as the entry for newcomers from Europe.

Edith Argabrite and her family fled Eastern Europe during the Holocaust and found refuge in Shanghai when they could not find it in the U.S. Years later Argabrite moved to the U.S. Now she returns at times to the Czech Republic, to what was once her homeland, and creates art about all that has transpired. *Family Tree* is a paper collage menorrhah, a memorial with images of four men in her family, all who had untimely endings: concentration camp, suicide, heart disease. In another work, she collages her father and his dog, an act of reclaiming part of her past which was torn from her. Her father had had a dachshund; now Argabrite owns a dachshund herself. Argabrite paints a sea of hands raising up an egg or embryo shape. It speaks of so many immigrants who have escaped horrible conditions to make something better for themselves or a new generation. And often these stories do not have simple happy endings, but a complexity of ramifications and emotions which continue for a lifetime. Some of Argabrite's works are made of torn paper — salvaged from recycled paper, from her own art castaways or from those of the children she teaches. The immediacy of this technique and its fractured nature relate to her subject matter. She is fearless in trying new media. *Trapped* is a bird cage of hearts with horrible, raw, crocheted figures hopelessly snared. Argabrite's work constantly breaks new ground as she shifts media and disciplines. Argabrite is a published poet and teacher. Her work is about life's larger journey, the bad times and the good.

The work of **José Arenas** is also poetic. He connects a painterliness and concern with collage with allusions to everyday Mexican forms, phrases, colors and textures. Some are drawn from his mother's stories about life in Mexico, others from his own life experiences of moving back and forth between Mexico and the United States. Now however he lives mainly here, in Silicon Valley, and teaches at Foothill College. *Autocartografía* is a mural-sized "mapping" piece, formed from paint and mixed media on paper. Images include drawn maps, Simplicity sewing patterns, family photos, the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, a French lesson, and hands with the words "sí, sí, perpetua." It is Arenas's own immigration journey, with references to his family, to labor, religious, and cultural issues. His work is about travel, place, and identity: "The other place — which is somewhere in the mind." There is "mental and physical geography." Arenas feels a dual identity, so two flags, two allegiances, show up in his paintings. He speaks of the conflict between the two, the "changing into something else." When he paints a ship alone on a watery globe, with ribbonlike routes crossing over and curling back on themselves, we see the magnitude and uncertainty of the journey.

Alma Lopez exhibits work from the series *1848*, which deals with land, border/borderless migrations, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and Mexican Americans in the U.S. landscape. Her digital prints include *California Fashion Slaves* (1997), which focuses on garment industry workers, and *Juan Soldado* (1997). Juan Castillo Morales, known as Juan Soldado, is the unofficial patron saint and protector of undocumented immigrants. He is not recognized by the church and is therefore an "illegal saint of 'illegal' immigrants." Lopez uses quotations from the book *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* by Richard Griswold del Castillo. Many of her works juxtapose a map of the border region, the words "Manifest Destiny" with an arrow, photos of a graffitied border wall, and young Chicana girls. In *The Linea* (1998), a young girl appears to balance on the border line and calls the border her home. Lopez was born in the city of Mochis. In *Santa Niña de Mochis* (1999), a young girl, wearing an angelic white dress with butterfly wings, stands in stark contrast before a bleak border scene and the Los Angeles skyline. Alma Lopez is a Los Angeles based artist who has produced collaborative murals and digital murals in California, Nevada, Texas, and Wisconsin. She is director and cofounder

der of Homegirl Productions, a public and visual art collaborative which focuses on the chiasmus of African American and Chicana/o experiences, and co-founding member of L.A. Coyotas, a Chicana artists' collective.

Rick Rocamora is known for his documentary photography and exhibits work from several series. One project is on Filipinos in North America (part of a larger series *Overseas Workers — New Filipino Heroes*): a domestic helper dancing at a church fundraiser, three Filipino immigration lawyers sitting in a courtroom, a worker making a delivery of *balikbayan* boxes, containers commonly used to ship things home. Another series is his *New California* project, such as a photo of a young Japanese woman, putting on a kimono for the first time for her wedding in America. Rocamora came to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1972 and was successful in pharmaceutical sales before he began his photography 10 years ago. Now he is dedicated to documenting the contributions of various immigrant communities. "It is always on my mind. I see immigrant workers in the street and I want to tell the stories — that immigrants might get the respect they deserve."

He has created a new series *Silicon Raj* for this exhibition, focusing on the contributions of the South Asian community to Silicon Valley, on their entrepreneurial leadership in creating jobs and prosperity for all Americans. Yet he notes for all their contributions and success, they still face disrespect and discrimination as do other immigrants and people of color. His works tell a story. Tech workers come in on H1B visas (in the early '60s it was Filipino medical workers), then they acquire green cards, and bring over their wives and parents. Next they respond to the needs of the community. They organize a social service agency that addresses the needs of seniors, youth, and women — "yoga, something to do for the older generation while the younger generation works sixteen hours a day." Religious ministers are brought over. Money is sent home to those in need. His images range from mentoring events of TiE, The IndUS Entrepreneurs, to networking of women in saris, to cooking in an Indian restaurant. Intimate images. Older South Asians meet in a local community center. Young professionals attend a book reading at Barnes and Noble in Berkeley.

On view in April is a collaborative public artwork on immigration, organized by the Euphrat Museum's Arts & Schools Program and involving elementary school students from Cupertino Union, Los Altos, and Sunnyvale School Districts.

A complementary exhibition *Between Two Trees* will be held at the Sunnyvale Creative Arts Center Gallery, March 15 - May 5.

Re Angel Island:

A portion of *made in usa: Angel Island Shhh* will be shown at the Evergreen College Learning Center, San Jose, March 1 - 31. *made in usa: Angel Island Shhh* is a traveling exhibition coordinated by Kearny Street Workshop.

Contact the Angel Island Association at www.angelisland.org or call 415 435-3522 to schedule a trip to Angel Island.

made in usa: Angel Island Shhh/A Youth Tour has been published. Supporters for the project include Euphrat Museum of Art, Kearny Street Workshop, Chinese Cultural and Historical Project, Moon Festival of Silicon Valley.