



NEWS RELEASE

September 5, 1994

For Immediate Release

Press release on art exhibition:

Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 2

September 27 - December 8, 1994

Museum Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 11-4
Wednesday evening 6-8
Saturday 11-2
Before selected Flint Center events
Open to tour groups by appointment

Reception: Thursday, October 13, 7-8:30, preceded by
Roundtable discussion 6-7

Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 2 presents works by visual artists who have immigrated to the United States, most since 1980, and who now live in the San Francisco Bay Area. Included are paintings, drawings, sculpture, photography, installations and mixed-media works by artists from Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, the former USSR, Taiwan, Turkey, and Vietnam.

Coming Across speaks of a U.S. culture constantly challenged and renewed, in part through the richly varied influence of these newly arrived artists. The exhibition raises psychological, historical, and social issues: 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 understanding of history, ethnicity, and diversity. Woven throughout is the concept of immigration as representative of the common human experiences of continual and rapid change, shifting identities, and loss of a secure place called home.

The exhibition is about cultural identity, about "home," literally and figuratively, and about recent history as the artists have lived it. The artists offer observations and commentaries about social, political, and historical issues, synthesizing and building upon ideas drawn from the different cultures they have experienced.

The exhibition reflects immigrants' continuing attraction to the San Francisco Bay Area. Through art schools, museums, community organizations and networks, 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 some artworks, the experiences of immigration are represented or interpreted directly. In others, they are submerged into form, technique, style, or gesture.

Part 2 includes artworks which viewers might examine in light of questions about political and social insights, and about the synthesis of ideas: "What do you have to say?" and "How have you developed a way to be here?"

Coming Across, Part 2 was curated by Jan Rindfleisch, building on previous collaborations. The exhibition developed from a multi-year collaboration between the Euphrat Museum of Art and The Bronx Museum of the Arts. Part 1 was presented February to April 1994.

The project — exhibition, public programs, and book — at the Euphrat Museum is supported by major grants from The Rockefeller Foundation and Apple Computer, Inc. The National Endowment for the Arts and Metropolitan Life Foundation provided planning grants.

Introduction

Coming Across, Part 2 begins with selections from *Silent Voice (I Have Something to Say)*, a 1993 photo-installation by **Su-Chen Hung** and **Gigi Janchang** (Taiwan). Portrayed on 5'x3' posters on bus kiosks along Market Street in San Francisco, twelve recent immigrants wore T-shirts printed in their native language saying, "I have something to say" — and portions of what they had to say were printed alongside their images.

Seyed Alavi's postcard installation *There is No Place Like Here*, located near the front door, has both a "point-of-sale" and an 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 were born? For the immigrant it is both and neither. This is true also for many people in today's rapidly shifting mental and physical landscapes.

What do you have to say?

Many of the artworks by recent immigrants offer social and political commentaries about the U.S. and/or their country of origin. Physical distance from the home country may allow a psychological freedom to observe and comment upon political, social, and historical issues. Some of the artists, who have felt on the inside and outside, part of a dominated culture and dominating culture, produce images which comment on events and issues in a third country or on a global scale. These ideas are sometimes presented abstractly, sometimes in a straightforward manner; some artists use irony and humor to speak to the viewer.

Enrique Chagoya's *Lonely Soul in Purgatory*, in oil on galvanized steel, depicts the figure of an Indian enveloped by orange flames; a flamelike cartoon character stands in one corner. Chagoya, originally from Mexico, says, "My retablo paintings are not only a homage to the anonymous painters of *retablos* (spiritual objects of devotion condensed in small paintings on tin), but also a form that best expresses my concerns about the lack of real spiritual foundations and the increasing materialism in our society."

Vi Ly created the six-by-eight-foot drawing *The Great Escape* after she started watching the news about Vietnamese refugees being dragged out of Hong Kong. The work is abstracted to peapod, boatlike, body-bag shapes, with multiple interpretations, timeless and temporal. "The Haitian refugee situation is our history repeating itself. It's exactly the way we were in the boats [fleeing Vietnam]. The only difference is that I'm watching it on TV now — and their skin color is different."

Elena Lokshina, as a dissident in the USSR, struggled for ten years to emigrate, finally coming to the U.S. in 1987. Here her paintings of short, stocky people highlight social issues; for example, two recent works, *Tight-rope Walker* and *General Direction*, were about non-conformity. "*Flea Market* relates to the fringes of society. We come from uniformity in Russia."

Watching the events of Tienanmen Square on TV inspired a new series of paintings for **Joanna Salska**, who came to the U.S. from Poland in 1982. "I never thought I'd paint anything political because I never thought I could express the rage within me...but then China happened and a gate opened. The *Tienanmen Square*

series contains my experiences of living under a communist regime. The event was like the last drop."

Canan Tolon's large-scale sculptural paintings often combine topographic measurements, references to dividing up land, and grass grown from seed right on the canvas. "Everyone has claims to land somewhere; someone says, 'We were here in the fifth century B.C.'" Tolon initiates thoughtful dialogue about oppression and conflict in Turkey and elsewhere. The work *Alidade* is part of her series entitled *Baski*, which means "prints" in Turkish, but also "oppression," as in applying pressure. "I painted landscapes in stages of destruction/construction and overlaid them with printed floral patterns using woodcut blocks. These are familiar fabric patterns which adorn Turkish homes." Tolon feels that war has reached our "interior landscapes," and we are being trained to tolerate higher doses of violence, becoming immune and alarmingly passive.

How have you developed a way to be here?

Many of the artists synthesize and build upon social, philosophical, esthetic, and educational ideas from the different cultures they have experienced. This is evidenced in the artwork itself and/or through the process of making the art, which may be produced singly or collaboratively

Wosene Kosrof's *Africa: The New Alphabet #3* is in acrylic on canvas; his *Wax and Gold* employs the more traditional goatskin. Both display a confluence of cultural references, including characters from the Amharic syllabary (Amharic is the dominant language in Ethiopia, Kosrof's country of origin), masks, and architectural forms. "I use Amharic calligraphy (*fiedel*) as a major compositional element. The characters have the forms of houses, human figures, textiles, and musical notes." Kosrof further states, "The African American experience has contributed a great deal to my artistic vision," and has intensified his appreciation of jazz, "always an element in my paintings."

Ky IV, Tho Soh IV, Luk Kan, Rath Kan, Leang Ngin, and Ouch Sith work with photocopy images from the U.S. and Cambodia, their country of origin, assembling mixed-media collages of their past and present lives. They participate in the **Cambodia Contemporary Arts Project**, which provides studio space, exhibitions and sales opportunities for refugees from Cambodia who have resettled in San Francisco; their mentor-teacher is California Arts Council Artist-in-Residence Mark Knego, who has introduced them to Western art techniques. Before they fled to this country in the early 1980s, most of these Cambodian artists worked in agricultural jobs. Now the artists, all older women, use collage to express the traumatic experiences they faced under the Khmer Rouge: family and friends killed, widespread death and destruction. **Ky IV** sees art as a tool to educate children from Cambodia about "where they come from."

Geoffrey Iheanyi Nwogu's *Species* includes images of insects, fruit, fish, and humans. The kola-wood sculpture gives a feeling of "oneness" in the universe, an idea which Nwogu connects to both Buddhism and the teachings of his father, sculptor Nwogu Josiah Anyanwu. "The entire universe is a family." Nwogu was one of the artists who founded the Mbaise School of Nigeria. His work combines African concepts and the Mbari forms of his Igbo culture with Eastern perspectives and a freedom of expression he has discovered since working in the United States.

Long Nguyen's *Tales of Yellow Skin*, a series of oil paintings now numbering twenty, is a form of storytelling and autobiography which starts most often with references to war: in *Tales of Yellow Skin, #5* and *#7*, a mound of severed heads and human organs. In one sense the heads could be considered a mass of people sharing the same fate, such as in the wanton killing in Cambodia; everyone suffers. In an alternative reading, the heads can represent parts of the same person—different emotions, ideas, or stages. *Tales* looks beyond Nguyen's experiences in Vietnam and evokes internal conflicts each of us face, particularly when old wounds do not heal, and our struggles for survival and growth.

Sandra Sunnyo Lee's *Illumination* is painted in rich layers of glowing color on a folding screen format. Lee, born in Korea, states: "In *Illumination* I painted the Chinese characters of a beautiful poem by the Zen poet Lao Tze. To me, the poem means something ('There is a split of hair between heaven and hell...'), but if that were all, I would write it in the traditional way, in calligraphy with black ink. But when I *Painted* this, I felt strange, just like eating rice with butter. It's different...a way of blending my Asian culture with Western culture."

Homage to America, a mural by **José Meza Velásquez**, includes the Statue of Liberty, pre-Hispanic mythic imagery, and a futuristic vision of American art and culture. Velásquez altered his original sketch to encourage artists from Mexico, El Salvador, Panama, Canada, Germany, Costa Rica, and the United States to participate, when they were visiting here in 1992. "The artists became a living example of the theme." More than 300 people contributed to this work at the Fruitvale Post Office in Oakland. "Every day about twenty-five people — all ages — dropped by to help." A large photographic reproduction of the central portion of the mural is on display and includes signatures of some of the participants.

Publication

The Euphrat Museum is publishing a book *Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants*, in conjunction with the exhibition. The book includes artwork and writings by the artists, plus commentaries related to art, immigration, and cultural exchange — and social, psychological, and political variables. The book is available at the Museum.

Public Programs

A variety of public programs — including lectures, artist visits, and activities for children — at the Museum, on campus, and at other sites are planned. In addition, *Who Built America?*, an interactive CD-ROM, will allow visitors to access oral histories, early films, images, and games relating to immigration to this country between 1876 and 1914.

Background Information

The exhibition is the result of a multi-year collaboration between the Euphrat Museum of Art and The Bronx Museum of the Arts. As part of the planning process, advisory groups were formed with The Bronx Museum, which created an East Coast version of this exhibition. Members included: Cecilia Burciaga, Education Consultant, Menlo Park, CA; José Antonio Burciaga, Artist and Writer, Menlo Park, CA; Enrique Chagoya, Artist and Curator, Berkeley, CA; Margi Dunlap, Associate Director, International Institute of San Francisco; Mulgeta Gerefa, 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 Diana Argabrite, Luis Cancel, Marilyn Day, Betti-Sue Hertz, Mark Knego, Andrew Lam, Sonia Melnikova, Juanita Meza Velásquez, Tsedal Mulugetta, Long Nguyen, Trinh Nguyen, Rebecca Rothfus, Vincenza Scarpaci, Loida Sorenson, Frederick Spratt, Grace C. Stanislaus, Joan Tuchman, Philip Verre, Carlos Villa, Lydia Yee.

The public is invited to a reception to meet the artists on Thursday, October 13, 7-8:30, preceded by a roundtable discussion at 6. This event will take place at the Euphrat Museum of Art and is open to the public free of charge. The Euphrat is wheelchair accessible.

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

Press photographs are available.

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