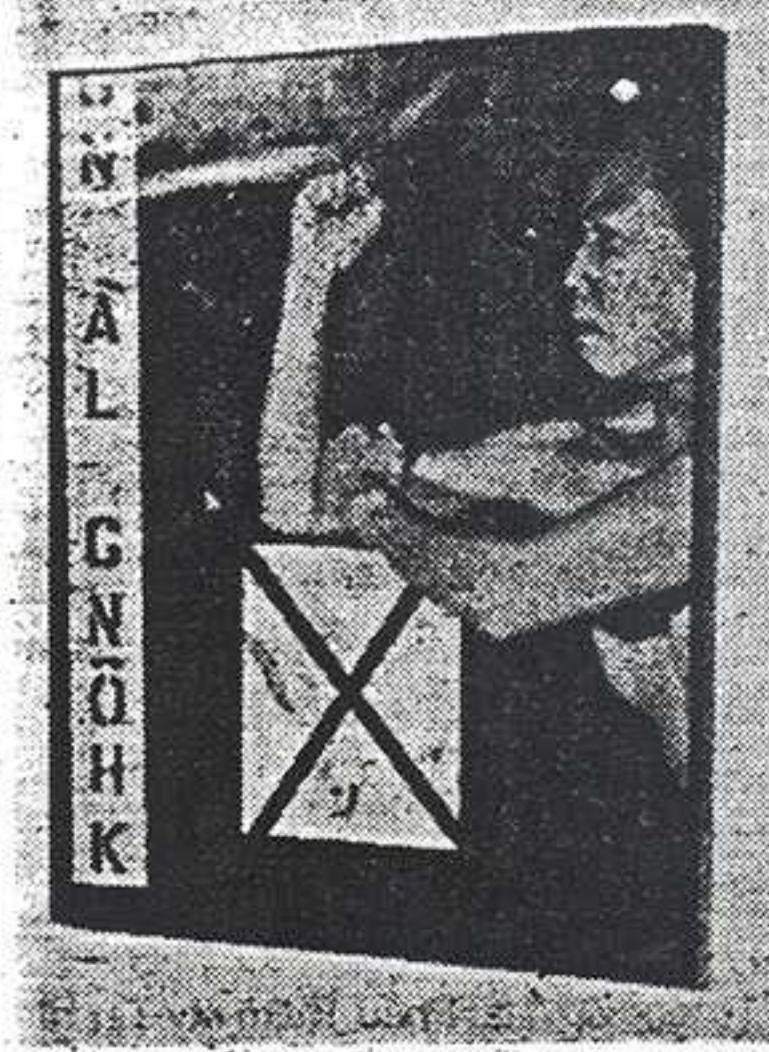
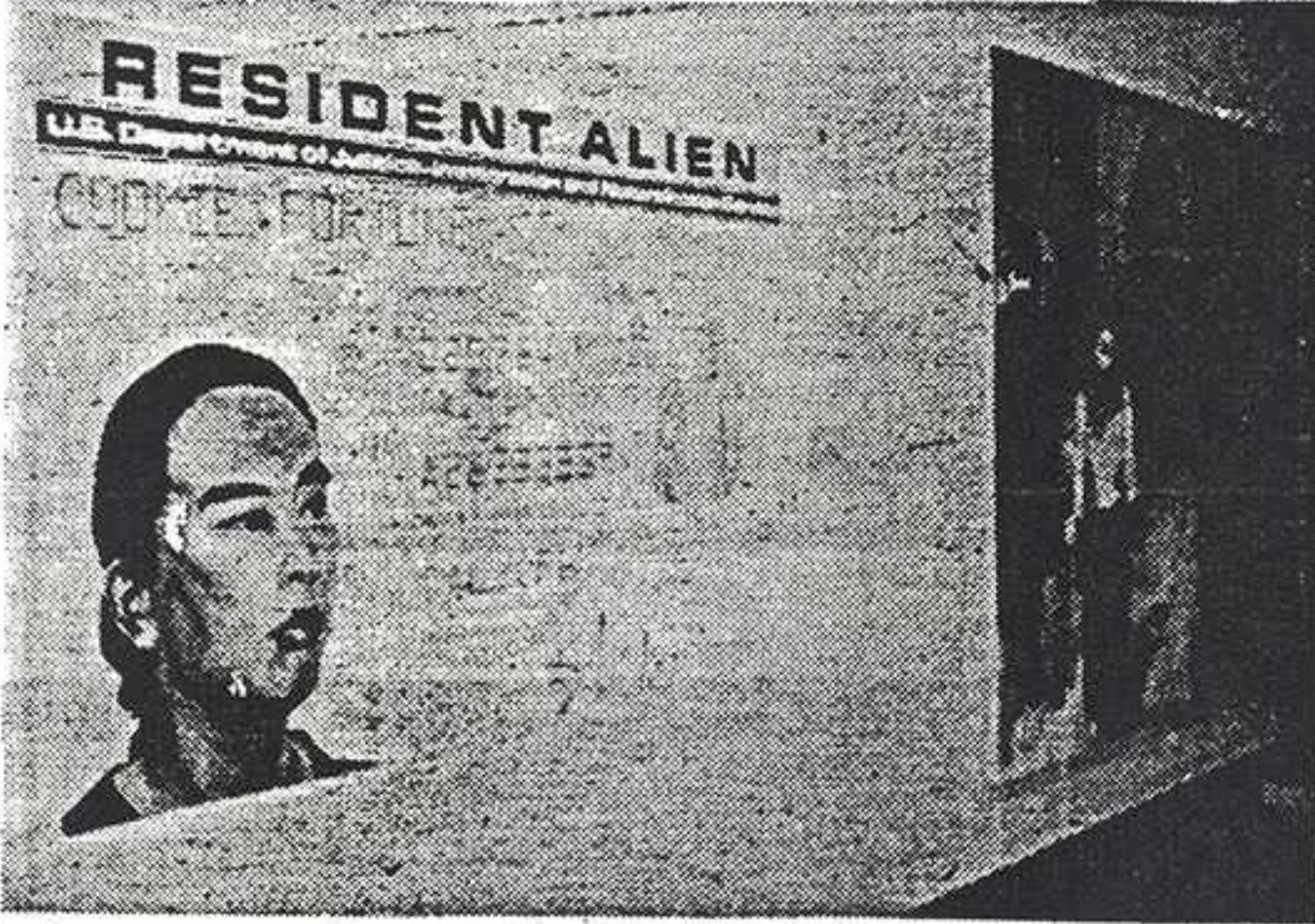


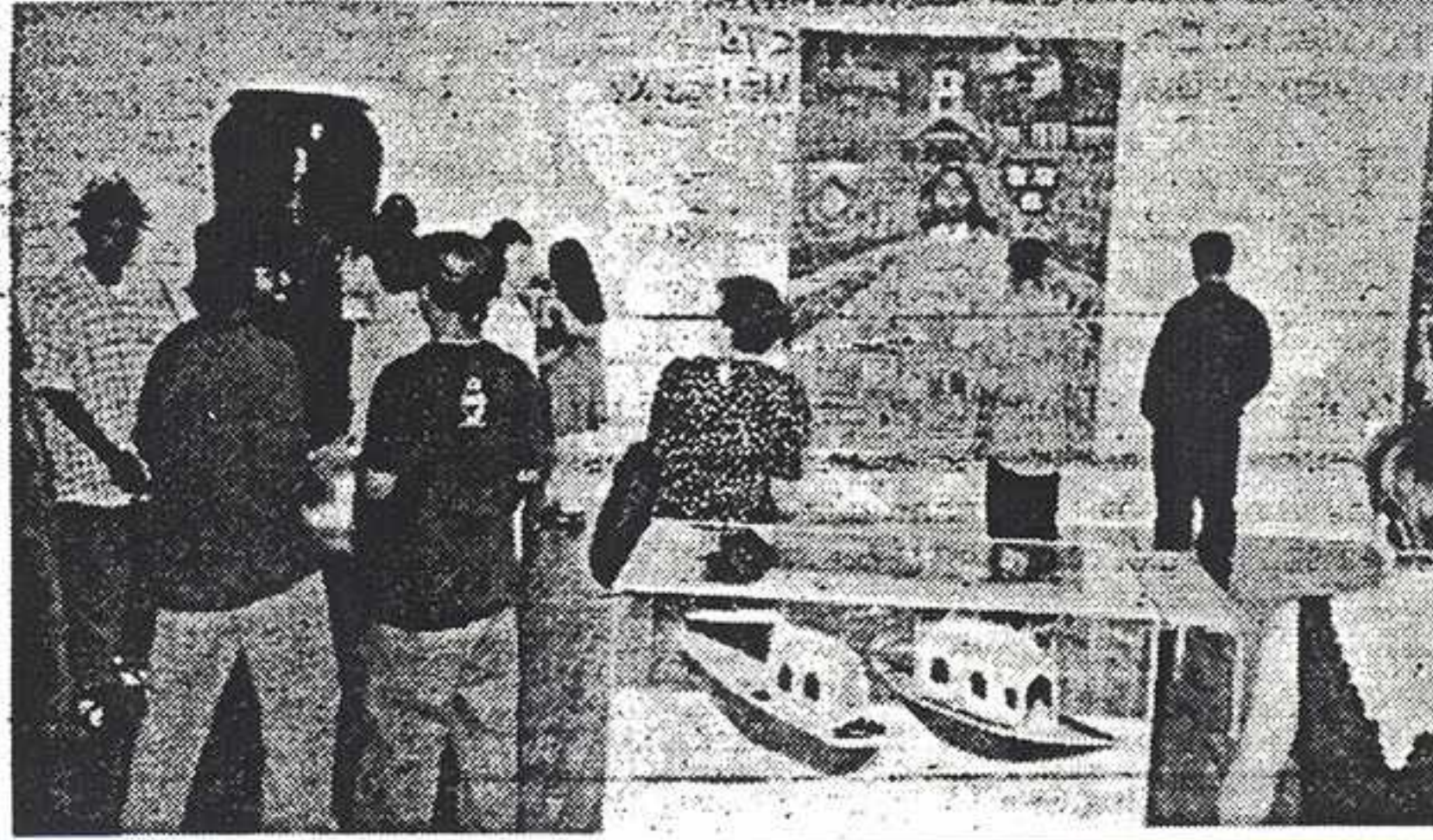
Arts and...

Blaffer Features Asian Artists

June 7 - The University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery held an opening reception for its new exhibit *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*. The exhibit was organized by Margo Machida for the Asia Society Galleries in New York and features works by 20 foreign-born Asian American artists.



The artists address issues of national heritage. The exhibit will continue through July 28. On June 13, the exhibiting artists Y. David Chung and Hung Lui, along with curator Machida, participated in a panel discussion in the university's Dudley Hall. Above right, Hanh Thi Pham's *Number 9, Expatriate Consciousness*, right, and Hung Liu's *Resident Alien*, are among works on exhibit by artists from Japan, China, India, Korea, Laos, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. For information, call 743-9525.



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The Asia Society Goes Contemporary

A Major Show of Asian American Artists Comes to New York.



In a dramatic departure from its usual fare of traditional Asian art, the Asia Society of New York heralds the spring with a major show of contemporary Asian American artists. A lively, perhaps even controversial, gathering of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and installations which portray cultural collision and transition will be featured in the exhibition, *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*.

"The unprecedented growth of the Asian American population in the last three decades has prompted a reexamination of traditional assumptions about East and West," says Vishakha Desai, director of the Asia Society Galleries. She believes that the *Asia/America* show "marks a new era in the Society's approach to Asian art."

"If we are to understand Asia properly in today's context, there is no way we could avoid dealing with contemporary Asian art," Desai says. "The goal we have to develop is a much more subtle, complex way of looking at Asian cultures and arts, and that complexity must involve contemporary expressions in

the visual arts, as well as Asian American issues."

Guest curator Margo Machida, a third-generation Japanese American, travelled the United States visiting studios and artists. For the show, she culled works from 20 artists whose national origins were Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Works from both from well-known artists such as Pacita Abad and Masami Teraoka, and emerging artists such as Laos-born Sisavath Panyathip, were included. Machida believes that, "While only a few works address the question of cultural identity through specific imagery, all are informed by the artists' struggles to define themselves as people of Asian descent living in America."

Most of the artists work in contemporary Western styles, which has become the international aesthetic language of our times. Some deal overtly with themes of transition, foreignness, or alienation. In *Resident Alien, Green Card* (1988), Hung Liu

Above: Hung Liu, Resident Alien, 1988. oil on canvas, 60 x 90 in.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



Masami Teraoka, *Kyoto Woman and Gaijin*, 1991, watercolor on paper, 22 3/8 x 30 1/16 in. Collection of Peggy and Richard Danziger.



Sung Ho Choi, *Korean Roulette*, 1992, mixed media on wood panel, 48 x 48 x 10 in. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

actually blows up the prized “green card” — which grants resident status to foreigners — onto a gigantic 90" x 60" oil ON on canvas, a thumb print on the right, a grim ID portrait on the left under the name “Cookie, Fortune.” Tseng Kwong Chi takes photographs of himself, sternly dressed in sunglasses and Mao suit, with backdrops of such famous American monuments and icons like the Statue of Liberty (see *Exhibition Reviews*, p.77) or Mount Rushmore.

Some speak to current entrapments, others refer to the past. Ken Chu incorporates a campy humor into his painted cut-outs. In *I need some more hair products* (1988), an Asian man carefully grooms his hair before the bathroom mirror, all the while imagining some tanned god with a head of golden hair. On a darker note, Sung Ho Choi’s mixed media *Korean Roulette* (1992) shows four bloodied hands rotating over a board of three-dimensional fruit and vegetables — an obvious reference to notable Korean participation in the greengrocers trade in New York — and, chillingly, a knife and a gun — a reference to the violence they sometimes have to face, especially when working in hostile neighborhoods. In a flash to the recent past, Hanh Thi Pham, in her *Along the Street of Knives* series, photographs her own surrealistic enactments of social disparity in colonial Vietnam.

Still others — like Zarina, with her house on wheels sculptures in cast aluminum, or Marlon Fuentes, with his tight photo-

graphic close-ups of meshed faces — do not immediately signal us onto issues of race or national origin.

The exception to the contemporary style is Masami Teraoka, born in Japan in 1936 and now living in Hawaii. Using watercolor, she emulates the traditional Japanese woodblock print, but so slyly updates her subject matter. In *Kyoto Woman and Gaijin* (1991) (a *gaijin* is a foreigner), a disjointed pair finds themselves snorkeling in the same sea — one a Japanese woman tucking a wooden comb in her hair, the other a Caucasian with sandy hair wringing what looks to be a handkerchief.

Asia/American is the first major exhibition of Asian American artists in a mainstream institution. Furthermore, Desai says that it is only the beginning of the Asia Society’s efforts to spotlight contemporary Asian American art. “We will not give up our traditional role,” she explains. “Instead, this is a move of expansion and addition.” Δ

Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art will run from February 16 to June 26, 1994, at the Asia Society at 725 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021. Discussion programs with Asian American visual artists and authors are slated for the spring. After New York, the show will travel to Tacoma Art Museum (Tacoma, Washington); the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis); the Honolulu Academy of Arts; and the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens, California. For



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[Scarlet Cheng]

Pacita Abad, *I Thought the Streets Were Paved with Gold*, 1991, acrylic, oil, wood, nylon bristle, and printed cloth on padded canvas, 95 x 69 in. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.