

*Asian American
Arts and Media, Inc.*



ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN
HERITAGE COUNCIL CONFERENCE

ARTS, CULTURE, MEDIA, PANEL
TITLE:

"IMPACT OF ARTS, CULTURE, AND MEDIA
ON THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF
ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS"

Time: Saturday, May 2, 1992, 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Location: Hyatt Regency Hotel, Crystal City, Arlington, VA

MODERATOR: HIRO, Visual Artist/Curator/Writer/Lecturer

PANELISTS: Pacita Abad, Visual Artist

Theo-dric Feng, Producer/Host of "Gold Mountain" Radio
Program, Radio Pacifica, WPFW, 89.3-FM

Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, Independent Film Producer/Writer,
"America Becoming," PBS

Siani Lee, TV News Anchor, News Channel 8

Terry Liu, Art Specialist, Folk Arts Program,
National Endowment for the Arts

MAHINA, Composer/Musician, Kumu Hula Hawaiian Culture/Dance,
Recording Artist, "Mahina at the Capitol"

Hilary Tham, Poet, Author of Bad Names For Women,
Paper Boats, and Tiger Bone Wine

1851 Columbia Rd.. NW. #501. Washington. DC 20009

PANEL DISCUSSION: "IMPACT OF ARTS, CULTURE, AND MEDIA UPON THE
POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS"

FOR: ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE COUNCIL CONFERENCE
May 2nd, 1992, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Crystal City, Arlington

I'd like to thank the organizers of this conference and I am glad to see there are many Asian Americans in the audience this morning. It is interesting because we as Asian Americans begin to think in terms of broader heritage not just Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Thai, etc., but as Asian Americans. In this respect, we are far behind than the larger Afro-Americans and the Hispanics who have forged a much greater cultural identity in the United States.

The main reason I imagine for this has been that the individual Asian cultures are much stronger and go further back in history in a number of Asian societies i.e. cultural traditions are much stronger in places like India, Indonesia, China, Japan than they were in Brazil, Peru or Nigeria even though some of that cultures are practiced. Nevertheless, this is the time we are here in America to look forward not to look back.

Most Americans' idea of Asian culture has been shaped by touring groups like Chinese acrobats, Indonesian puppeteers, Indian sitar player, Filipino bayanihan dancers etc. all of which represent very strong national cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, most people have not been aware of the impact of Asian Americans in the more widely accepted "popular" culture.

However, a closer look at our popular culture shows that Asians are playing a much greater role. In fact I am very pleased to say that our role is becoming more prominent. In music, it is a common sight to see Asian musician in many symphony orchestra, i.e. Yoyo Ma is considered one of the best cellist in the world. Yoyo Ma's sister Yo Cheung together with her filipino husband and foremost guitarist Michael Dadap founded the Children's Symphony Orchestra in New York. Another prominent filipina pianist is Cecile Licad.

In the theater, two of the biggest broadway hits are the almost all Asian cast of David Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, and of largely Asian cast of *Ms. Saigon*. These two plays have heightened the awareness of the role of Asian American actors and I see that reverberating out to the local community theater group like the one Terry Liu and I just participated, which was a Japanese play by Mishima directed by David Yang of Chinese descent and Susan Park of Korean descent working with actors, designers, and stage manager coming from Japan, Philippines, China and Korea. The play closed last month at the Sackler Gallery.

In the design and fashion world, the influence of Asian Americans has been very pronounced particularly with Asian designers from Japan and inclusion of Asian fabrics especially from India, batik from Indonesia and Malaysia becoming a common place in America. I am also

proud to say one of our noted designers is Josie Natori who was recently featured in the New York Times and one of her specialty is lingerie which is sewn calado (a special kind of Philippine embroidery).

In literature, there has been a number of award winning writers who are Asian American: Betty Bao Lord, Amy Tan, Bienvenido Santos, David Louie, Bukratee from India, the poet Leong Lee, the playwright Valena Houston, among others.

In the contemporary art world I am sad to say the role of Asian American artists has not been as pronounced. On the international and national level, I could only think of Mel Chin and Nam Jun Paik from Korea. However, on a local basis, I see many more coming like Tom Nakashima, David Chung, Khristine Aono, Joey Manlapaz, Hiro and Yuriko Yamaguchi who are all based in metropolitan Washington.

In terms of subject matter, there is not too much of a common thread that will bind Asian Americans artists together. One does abstract, second does social realist works, third does conceptual, and another does realistic paintings.

From my part, my art reflects a lot of where I am coming from and

my experiences in the last 20 years as a painter as I spend time in the Philippines, United States and wide range of developing countries. I have done many series of paintings but I want to show you some examples of recent works which I call my immigration series. These paintings were shown at the Ellipse Gallery in Arlington last October.

Since my return to DC I have been aware of the growing number of immigrants: people of color. Given the fact that I have been overseas I was able to emphasize. I have always believed that an artist has a special obligation to remind society of its social responsibility. I have selected my subjects in order to call people's attention to the new breed of immigrants coming to America:

Slide 1 - Where They Are Coming From

Slide 2 - If My Friends Could See Me Now

Slide 3 - I Thought The Streets Are Paved With Gold

Slide 4 - From Dora Wat To Sushi To Kimchee To Chicken,
Wings and Tings

Slide 5 - How Mali Lost Her Accent

Slide 6 - Caught At The Border

In conclusion I believe that in the early generation, Asian Americans coming to America have not put high value on art as we concentrated more on our professional careers like engineering, medicine and science and computer and this has not been a bad thing. However, as Asian American society matures, the next generation would put more emphasis on cultural art and I am convinced we will have a wider role to play and will get to the point that the general public will not stereotype actors as Susi Wong and Bruce Lee.