

Past, Present, and Hopeful Futures: Situating *(ex)CHANGE* and *Then and Now*

Alexandra Chang

Between 1980 and 1990, the Asian American population in Philadelphia grew more than 100%, and that shift in demographics, along with the loss of manufacturing jobs, compounded by internally segregated neighborhoods, produced racial tensions culminating in community violence. Two major incidents highlight that volatility: a deadly 1991 clash between Asian American and white youth at McCreech Playground in South Philadelphia; and the 1989 murder of Heng Lim, struck on the head with a stick while being called a racial slur, eerily echoing the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin. These incidents revealed the structural nature of on-the-ground racism in Philadelphia, as well as the city's failed criminal justice system. They were also crucially important in galvanizing solidarities across Asian American communities in the city, including the formation of a new Asian American arts activism.

Asian American arts activism throughout the U.S. has always been tied to community services. Basement Workshop in New York's Chinatown and Kearny Street Workshop in San Francisco emerged in the 1970s alongside service organizations such as Asian Law Caucus: Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Chinese Progressive Association, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian Americans for Equality, and Chinatown Manpower Project. In the 1990s and 2000s, a wide range of Asian American social service organizations appeared in major cities across the U.S. In Philadelphia, Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition (SEAMAAC) and Asian Americans United launched in 1984 and 1985. Within these local and national ecosystems, Asian Arts Initiative emerged in 1993, combining arts and advocacy. Networks of artists and supporters connected through the Initiative uniquely engaged communities in Philadelphia proper and drew direct lines to New York, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Denver, and even across continents to the concerns and communities of East, South, and Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately the rich history of Asian American cultural organizing in Philadelphia has remained largely off the national radar. Though lesser known than the major Asian American hubs of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, Philadelphia continues to drive Asian American arts and activism, especially in the practices of placemaking and socially engaged art and performance, and Asian Arts Initiative stands at the center of this work.

For its 25th Anniversary, the Initiative commissioned artwork for a public art initiative and an exhibition in its own gallery space. *(ex)CHANGE: History, Place, Presence* was a multi-sited public art exhibition of six public art projects; the exhibition *Then and Now* was located on all three stories of the Asian Arts Initiative building on 1219 Vine Street. The two related exhibitions tell the story of AAI and its founding moment. Both reference past and ongoing cycles of anti-Asian sentiment and violence in the U.S. and in Philadelphia, the changing demographics of Philadelphia and its neighborhoods, and the agency of communities that continue to advocate for immigrant rights and community support.

(ex)CHANGE: History, Place, Presence

(ex)CHANGE asks: what comes from the space of encounter, dialogue, and exchange—what comes out of change? It presents rich and layered narratives of change, community, and connection throughout multiple sites in Philadelphia. The city perennially grapples with gentrification and buried narratives, such as those highlighted by the featured artists. Found within their works are invisibilized stories of immigration, racism, and ghettoization.

Boone Nguyen

Boone Nguyen first came to live in Philadelphia as a child refugee from Vietnam. His installation *Đi thì không có đường về (Leave, Then There is No Way Home)* ties Philadelphia to Vietnam through video and images of the people he encountered in South Philadelphia, where the Southeast Asian diasporic community has grown exponentially since Nguyen's first arrival. The installation draws from Mifflin Square Park, adopted as an active community space by the Southeast Asian diasporic community, and includes images and video of his mother and people he met in his parents' villages in Vietnam, where he witnessed the sweeping of gravesites, burial practices, and intimate relationships to the land and history. In his mother's village, he met people living with and transforming craters left by American bombs during the War, some of which have been adapted into active fish ponds. Nguyen's installation envelops the viewer in moving projections, including a large-format projection of a motorbike winding its way through the streets in Vietnam. The draped projection serves as a doorway connecting the viewer from one place to another, welcoming viewers into the space. Photographs surround the audience-goer on each wall, and on the far wall is another large-scale projection, this time of Mifflin Square Park in full activity, complete with children at play. The effect is a layered multi-sited-ness inside the single community space of the SEAMAAC office.

Nguyen's work investigates agency and how, despite multiple social, political, and economic dislocations, the communities of which Nguyen and his family are a part breathe new life into abandoned spaces, reimagining and repurposing them. Nguyen's project counters stereotypes of victimhood, instead highlighting community members as active agents in their own lives. To develop the installation, Nguyen conducted oral interviews and workshops with community elders in Philadelphia, activating previously undocumented stories and memories and foregrounding the work of elders to build their own lives and futures.

Rea Tajiri

Rea Tajiri's multi-sited work *Wataradori: Birds of Passage* makes space for a different sort of public recognition, inscribing a specific community into the larger city's collective memory. The piece first turns our attention to a non-descript Philadelphia hostel, where a Japanese American couple, Saburo and Michiyo Inouye, resettled after their incarceration in the Japanese internment camps during World War II. The hostel became a home through which numerous Japanese Americans passed before finding homes in the city. The word "Wataradori" from the piece's title references a migratory bird, and was a derogatory term for migrant workers such as many of the first Japanese immigrants who arrived on the West coast in the late 1800s. Where the hostel once stood on 3228 Chestnut Street is now a franchise of the Joe Coffee chain, across from Creese Courtyard, located within Drexel University's commercial retail complex. The installation features large-scale gray-toned images of the couple flowing from the windows of a campus building into the courtyard space, publicly recognizing the history and significance of the site. It also includes a recreated vignette of a Japanese American family at home on the porch of the site where the hostel moved, 4238 Spruce Street, now a boarding house for university students. In front of the porch in the yard are elements of the everyday, including a child's toy wagon—objects lifted from archival photographs from the Japanese internment camps. As viewers walk by the installation on a picturesque Victorian, porch-lined Philadelphia street, they are transported by a voice reciting the words of a Japanese song about remembering family stories, casting a haunting presence of the past. At what is now Spiral Q's storefront 3808 Lancaster Avenue is an imagined market storefront, recreated from a photo taken by Tajiri's father of a former shop on that street. When viewed at night, the installation, titled *Rising Sun Night Market* after the former shop, lights up from within the vitrine with Tajiri's otherworldly projection, animating a moss-lined terrarium-like storefront of preserved memories of the past. Inside are images of Tajiri's mother, fake strawberries, referencing the strawberry fields owned by Japanese American farmers prior to internment, and a multitude of archival objects and vessels bearing markings made by the artist as measurements of life and time.

Tajiri ties together these previously unmarked spaces in the city with a light blue vintage cruiser bicycle. A humble marker closer to an everyday object than a monument, the bicycle evokes both the story of girl who, while incarcerated, shared her bicycle for others to ride and the larger history of Japanese making a home in Philadelphia. Rather than concentrating on one site, Tajiri marks four separate places of importance throughout Philadelphia with the ghostly blue bikes, creating a larger mapping of the shared history of Japanese Americans in the city.

Chinatown Art Brigade

For *(ex)CHANGE*, the Chinatown Art Brigade explores its own practice of community engagement and what it means to be working in Philadelphia rather than Manhattan's Chinatown, where CAB is based. A cultural collective now comprised of more than fifteen artists, cultural workers, and activists, CAB has focused specifically on issues of gentrification in its home neighborhood, working with local organization CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and the artist/activist collective The Illuminator to bring attention to community concerns of displacement and build community dialogue and engagement.

The starting point of CAB's *(ex)CHANGE* project is the disenfranchisement and displacement that tie Chinatowns in both New York and Philadelphia together. Their project appears through a collaboration with the Chinese Youth Organizing Project at Asian Americans United, and literally amplifies community concerns about detainment and deportation proceedings by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. Because the youth group is run in Chinese, the collaborative project was conducted in both Chinese and English. A third collaborator was The Illuminator, which featured its "People's Pad," by which audience participants' drawings and writings were projected directly onto the surface of a building, like live, large-scale light projections, serving as the focal point for a community rally on immigrant and voting rights.

Byron Au Yong & Aaron Jafferis

The composer Byron Au Yong and lyricist Aaron Jafferis also draw upon activism and direct action in their *Activist Songbook*, a songbook of fifty-three songs for use in rallies. The project is the third installment of a trilogy exploring Asian American masculinity, the first of which, *Stuck Elevator*, took the form of an opera and told the story of a Chinese restaurant worker who was stuck in an elevator for days before being released and the second of which, *(Be)longing, a.k.a. Trigger*, delved into the Virginia Tech shooting, gun violence, isolation, mental illness, and healing. *Activist Songbook* is inspired by Vincent Chin's murder and the ensuing protests that would spur the Asian American community across the U.S. into action. Au Yong and Jafferis draw upon the history of Asian American activism, including interviews with activists and activist musicians throughout the U.S. By thinking through the aesthetics of activist music, including, for example, the spirituality of a composition such as "Amazing Grace," or the ways in which chants activate a crowd, Au Yong and Jafferis create rally chants and compositions to promote action.

Performances of the compositions took place at each public art site throughout the 25th anniversary celebration, activating audiences of the *(ex)CHANGE* public artworks across the city. Au Yong and Jafferis also collaborated with local musicians and singers to lead rallying chants aboard the buses that shuttled audience-goers between art sites, recognizing the key role of buses as shared communal space in activist histories.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



Boone Nguyen, *Đi thì không có đường về*
(*Leave, then there is no way home*)

Site-specific installation with photography
and projection at SEAMAAC Community
Outreach Office



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

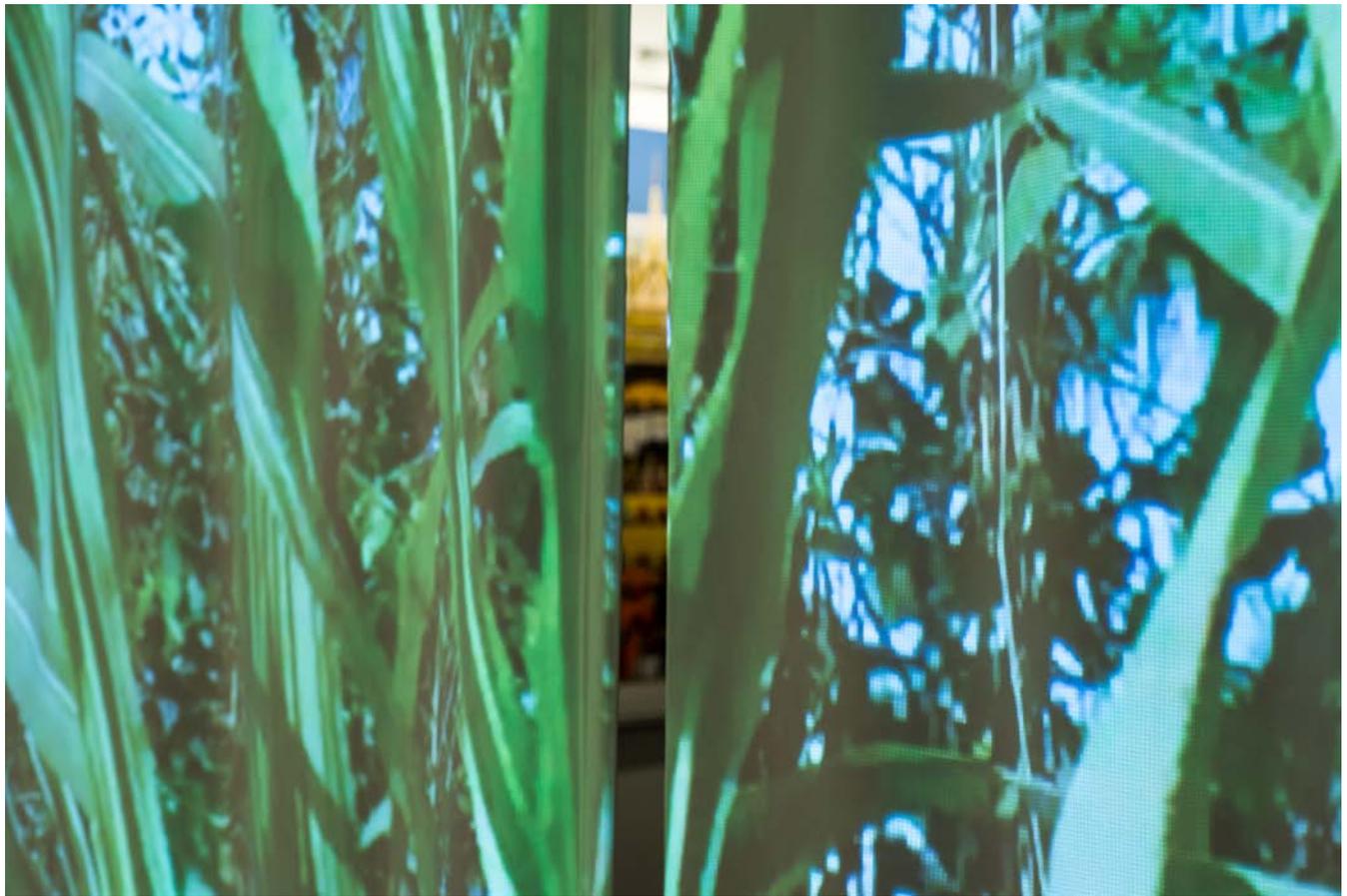


PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE





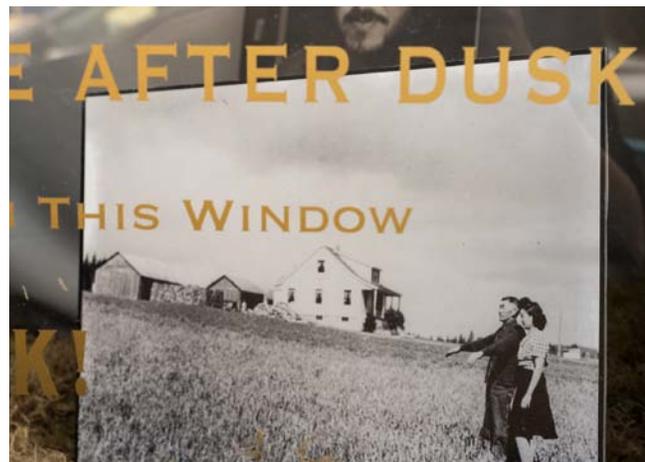
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

Rea Tajiri, *WATARIDORI: Birds of Passage*

Multi-sited outdoor installations with projection at Creese Courtyard, Rising Sun Night Market (aka Spiral Q), 4238 Spruce Street, and Tatsui Baba Gravesite, Woodlands Cemetery



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSCH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE

Here To Stay

Large-scale projections by Chinatown Art Brigade in collaboration with Asian American United's Chinese Youth Organizing Project and The Illuminator at 1013 Arch Street



CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE

**IF WE STAY
SILENT,
NOTHING WILL CHANGE**



CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE



COURTESY BYRON AU YONG AND AARON JEFFERIS

ACTIVIST SONGBOOK

Byron Au Yong and Aaron Jefferis, *Activist Songbook*

Pop-up performances at Asian Arts Initiative, (ex)CHANGE public art sites, and aboard buses shuttling audience between sites as part of AAI's 25th anniversary opening weekend

We Will Not Be Silent (rally)

Au Yong/Jafferis

*go in any order
translate into other languages
freely overlap and repeat*

Hopeful ♩ = 156

5 1 2 4 3 1 5 7 5

si - lent. Be si - lent. Be si - lent. (Be)

Snap

4 3 2 1 4 3

I/We will not be si - lent.

Snap

4 3 2 1 4 3

I/We will not be si - lent.

COURTESY OF BYRON AU YONG AND AARON JAFFERIS

rub hands ad libitum

Activist Songbook Draft (3/17/18)



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL CHO FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



MIOTTO MOSAIC ART STUDIOS

Shahzia Sikander, *The Perennial Gaze*

Site-specific installation with mosaic tile at the Community College of Philadelphia



MIOTTO MOSAIC ART STUDIOS

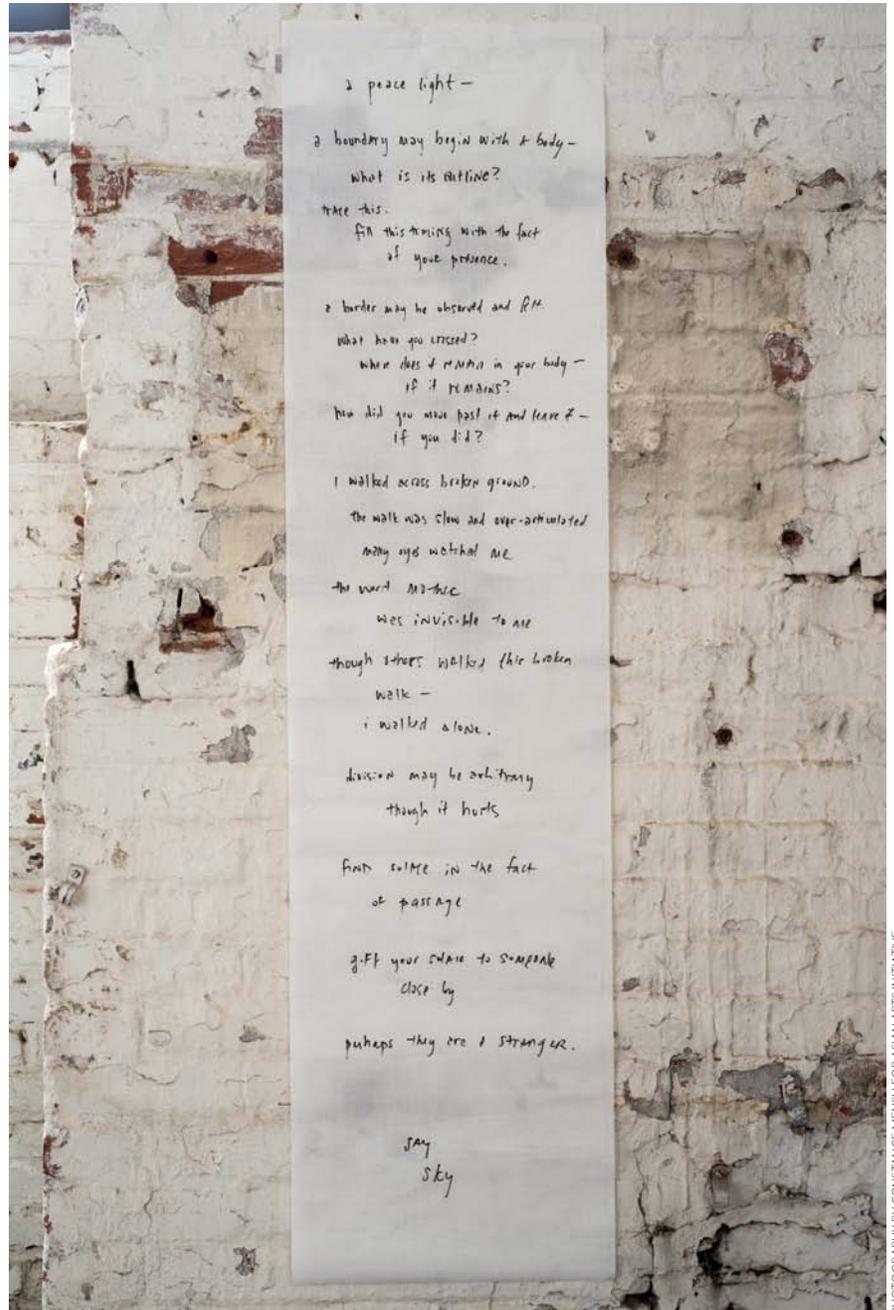


PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MENSH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

Sueyeun Juliette Lee, *Peace Light*

Site-specific installation with mulberry paper lanterns, collective writings, and collaborative performance with Jungwoong Kim at 448 North 10th Street

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MIENSH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANCE MIENSH FOR ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

a peace light -
a boundary may begin with a body -
what is its outline?
trace this.
fill this tracing with the fact
of your presence.
a border may be observed and felt.
what have you crossed?
what does it remain in your body -
if it remains?
how did you move past it and leave it -
if you did?
I walked across broken ground.
the walk was slow and over-anthologized
many eyes watched me
the word ~~artistic~~
was invisible to all
though others walked this broken
walk -
i walked alone.
division may be arbitrary
though it hurts
find solace in the fact
of passage
gift your share to someone
close by
perhaps they are a stranger.
say
sky

Shahzia Sikander

The Perennial Gaze reflects artist Shahzia Sikander's interest in Islamic book arts and manuscripts, particularly how these traditional works of miniature painting and calligraphy from the Muslim world now mostly reside in the storage collections of Western museums, a legacy of a colonial period in which these books were stolen and circulated into the global marketplace. Focusing on historical miniature painting in the mid-eighties—a time when traditional art was not popular as a medium of expression—Sikander became a pioneer, transforming a male-dominated practice from a feminist perspective, drawing new international interest in the tradition through her contemporary play on the form.

The image of the woman as vessel depicted in this work engages with the idea of ownership of women's bodies. Sikander has found herself heavily criticized by intellectuals in Pakistan for her choice to live and work in the U.S. as a diasporic artist. She finds herself negotiating her place as a target while continuing to critique those in control of the master narratives of history. With the recent #MeToo movement and renewed attention to global misogyny, Sikander's work emerges at a timely moment to examine the expunging of immigrant and women's narratives from history. *The Perennial Gaze* will be on view at the Community College of Philadelphia, beginning October 2018 for one year.

Sueyeun Juliette Lee

Sueyeun Juliette Lee's work *Peace Light* negotiates a space between her diasporic self and the memories of familial traumas associated with the division of North and South Korea. Lee gestures toward healing through Korean salpuri dance, a traditional ritual dance performed to remove evil and bring peace. The ash and the unfinished, dust-filled warehouse of the Arts and Crafts Holdings building at 448 North 10th Street within which she and choreographer/collaborator Jungwoong Kim move throughout the piece signal the ugliness that is a part of this suffering, healing, and experience.

For Kim, insistent that Lee participate as a dancer within the piece, the space serves as one of spontaneous choreography. One of the most poignant moments comes at the performance's end, when Lee rolls across a long sheet of mulberry paper, a material found in many of her works. Handfuls of ash that she is given by a family member mark the page with her body. Recalling her work as a poet and a publisher of chapbooks by writers of color, Lee also gathers the many voices of her personal network of Korean diasporic writers in the form of writings that adorn the mulberry paper lanterns placed throughout the space, crafted by her longtime friend and designer Kai Wei Hsu. For Lee, the experience of healing trauma crosses into current experiences of community divides and immigration in the U.S. Lee's work calls to the past histories that mark us, the building of communities that surround us, and the creativity that imagines the possibilities that free us.

Then and Now

For *Then and Now*, eighteen artists touch upon how we have grappled with continuing cycles of racial violence in the U.S., and how the arts and artists can play an important part of crossing racial and community divides to create dialogue, community building, and increased understanding between people.

Jean Shin

New York-based Jean Shin first created *Chinatown 20/20* as a part of AAI's 2005-2006 "Chinatown In/flux" exhibition. She collected used eye glasses for the work, which was originally installed in the storefronts of three Chinatown businesses—a doctor's office, a beauty salon, and a noodle shop—inviting viewers to look through the different glasses from both sides of the wall. In this first iteration of the piece, the many different frame styles and lenses gestured to the diversity within Chinatown, resisting the stereotype of homogenous masses of the immigrant *other*. For the *Then and Now* exhibition, Shin introduces a new iteration of the piece, one that activates AAI's street-level window and greets the viewer as the first artwork as you enter into the gallery. Shin notes: "It symbolically allows us to look back at the Asian Arts Initiative's history, as well as physically allowing the viewer to look through the prescription lenses to the continued work ahead."

Ken Lum

Vancouver-born and Philadelphia-based artist Ken Lum's *Tragic Philadelphians* is a series of nine bronze sculptural busts that capture the likenesses of tragic heroes from Philadelphia's many alternative or lesser known communities, from Birdie Africa, the sole survivor of the MOVE bombing—in which five children and six adult members of the Philadelphia-based black liberation group were killed by the Philadelphia Police—to Kathy Chang(e), an Asian American performance artist who staged at suicide by self-immolation on the University of Pennsylvania campus. Lum focuses the viewer's attention on narratives written out of history, work he has also conducted as a Chief Curatorial Advisor for Monument Lab, a public art and history initiative based in Philadelphia that questions the conventional idea of the monument and who is being monumentalized.

Catzie Vilayphonh

The immersive three-channel video installation *S.O.S. in Reverse* is inspired by Catzie Vilayphonh's experience of meeting other Lao Americans, "sometimes by accident," she notes, "sometimes out of a desperate need to seek community, not always so easy, but certainly welcome." The installation works to include the stories of those who may not usually see themselves as a part of the arts community. Realizing that the Philadelphia Lao refugee community has often found it difficult to take part in her past work, performed primarily in English, Vilayphonh creates visual and audio components for this work specifically to be more inclusive.

Linh Dinh

Linh Dinh's installation is a set of six excerpts from his online project *Postcards from the End of [the] America[n Empire]*, short personal essays that speak to his diasporic experience as an artist based in Philadelphia upon the eve of his returning to live in his birth country, Vietnam. His writings depict the various exchanges and interactions he has with people on his travels. Alternatively accepted and culturally alienated, Dinh paints himself as a global citizen—at times at home with and at other times an outsider to those he encounters. The resulting web of narratives is a poignant picture of the fading impression of America in an Asia seen as both a child of its colonial past and a beacon for the global future.

Maria Dumlao

Philadelphia-based Maria Dumlao's site-specific installation *Pacific, 1993* draws on Dumlao's interest in the relationship between the Philippines and the U.S., and how that relationship has shaped the global movements of people. Her print incorporates multiple narrative layers that wove through the year 1993—the year that AAI was founded—in relation to the Pacific, the Philippines, and the global Filipinx diaspora. Viewing the print through individual colored lenses of red, green, and blue (RGB) brings those various layers to the fore. Hidden within the larger printwork and embroidery on the colored mesh installation are: the Mt. Pinatubo volcanic eruption and a U.S. military war ship in the Pacific; balikbayan boxes (translated as repatriate boxes) used by the Filipinx diaspora to send care packages back home; the ill-fated Golden Venture that carried undocumented Chinese incarcerated by the U.S.; Imelda Marcos' shoes; and the natural environment of the sea. Dumlao's work exposes the multiple perspectives through which one can view a single item or instance, inviting us to admit to our mediated experience of the world, and to engage with other possible narratives and views.

Double A Projects

Athena Robles and Anna Stein have backgrounds in sculpture, drawing, design, and installation. As Double A Projects, they make public, interactive projects that explore generosity, exchange, and audience engagement. In *Memory Bank*, the artists engage with the idea of a collective memory of AAI, creating memory prompts—based on research into the organization's archives—for AAI community members to complete. The gathered memory card information will become part of an online interactive archive, a virtual memory bank of and for those whom the Initiative has influenced throughout its twenty-five years.

Anula Shetty & Michael Kuetemeyer

Time Lens is an interactive multi-platform art project and mobile app that features a series of immersive panoramas documenting Pearl Street, an alleyway in Philadelphia's Chinatown North neighborhood located directly behind AAI. Pearl Street is home to a range of inhabitants, from the artists engaging with work at the Initiative to the men from the Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission to new developers building luxury high-rise housing. Through *Time Lens*, Philadelphia-based artists Anula Shetty and Michael Kuetemeyer document the inhabitants and changing neighborhood, allowing viewers to experience walking along the street and interacting with those who are a part of the life of the neighborhood.

Eiko Fan

My History is a retrospective installation by Philadelphia-based sculptor and performance artist Eiko Fan and includes a range of her work spanning several decades, from the early 1980s through the present. Fan includes photos of her *Live Wood Sculpture* events from 1983 through 1999, which combine the use of portable sculptures and improvised pantomime and music. The wing has been a favorite portable sculptural element, and Fan includes in this installation her original *Wing* and *Winged Vehicle Sculpture* from 1981, when she departed from her one-piece sculpture technique inspired by Japanese Buddha sculptures. At the center pedestal of the installation is *When Mama Became Buddha*, a work Fan created after her mother's death in 2000. For Fan, the path of the paulownia tree (Empress Tree) that is found in Asia and migrated to grow in Pennsylvania reflects her life path. She uses paulownia, pear, and cherry woods in her *Chain Saw Sketches of My Family* (2014-2018), located at the bottom right side of the installation.

Yong Soon Min

After the dual trauma of the passing of her parents and a recent health scare that forced her to relearn how to speak, Los Angeles-based artist Yong Soon Min increasingly shifted her work to address language, her father's personal papers on cosmology, and the possibilities of reimagining our worlds. Min's *Mnemonic Journey* immerses the viewer in multiple created worlds, linking the past to her envisioning of what might be. Referencing the use of the chaekgeori form from traditional Korean painting, in which bookshelves are painted on a screen and pulled back at a corner, like a curtain, to reveal a narrative beneath the image, Min prints a large-scale photograph of her personal library as curtains. Beneath the curtains are images referencing the numerous places the artist has lived in the past. At the center are shipping containers, each containing portals into imagined worlds: a beloved stone grouping found on Cheju Island, Korea; bookmobiles around the world; bicycling in space; a container that is half full/half empty of water; and finally a path leading to a Moebius strip-like looped journey, where memory, the present, and the future are interminably linked.

Anida Yoeu Ali

In May 2018, artist Anida Yoeu Ali suffered the loss of her work *The Red Chador* when it was suspiciously lost in transit as Ali returned to the U.S. from a performance in Ramallah. Since 2015, Ali had donned the glittering red-sequined chador for performances engaging in silence with a global public—walking the streets and guillotining baguettes in a museum in Paris, and wielding protest signs bearing the words “Ban Me,” “Nasty Woman,” and “I am A Muslim” in Hong Kong, among other encounters. To open a space of communal grieving, Ali presents a digital online memorial and a physical memorial wall, framed by two funeral wreaths, that serves as a space for visitors to leave notes and objects for *The Red Chador*. If the chador has become a physical marker of otherness and a tool for racial profiling in the anti-Muslim “Global War On Terror,” *The Red Chador* spent her life sparking dangerous encounters and, in her loss, reveals the possibility of healing.

Dinh Q. Lê

Dinh Q. Lê is well known for his work on war, trauma, and memory utilizing a powerful combination of digital and traditional craft where the hand of the artist can be felt—from digital photo-weavings and large-scale video installation to elongated photography. For *WTC in Four Moments*, Lê elongates and videos the length of the photos of the moments before, during, and after the fall of the World Trade Center, as well as during its rebuilding. The installation captures the trauma of 9/11, when the World Trade Center fell and 2606 persons perished, but also opens the trauma to include those profiled as Muslim around the world, racialized as the enemy other in the “Global War On Terror.” The photos evoke Buddhist prayer wheels, their images stretched into long, mesmerizing lines of abstraction. Low pitched hums emanating from each video combine to create a sound at once foreboding and meditative, reminiscent of the Buddhist “om.” The final image, of the World Trade Center’s rebuilding, leaves us with the idea that we might shape the future by remembering and understanding the past.

Shelly Bahl

New York-based artist Shelly Bahl engages with orientalism, transculturality, design, and architecture in her work. Her “Peace Force Security” office is a fictionalized environment, surrounded by security cameras and custom-wallpapered with a repeat pattern. For the wallpaper design, Bahl transforms a well-known pictogram—a road sign graphic of a running family used to warn motorists of undocumented immigrants crossing highways near the U.S.-Mexico border—into the company logo of “Peace Force Security.” Viewers are instructed to sit and fill out a form to receive a gift of Peace Force Security-branded candy, recalling the childhood warning “Don’t take candy from strangers.” The installation turns the idea of an immigration policing unit on its head. Highlighting structural indoctrination, racial profiling, and how immigrants live their everyday lives, Bahl asks us to question our current position while affecting an underlying unease.

Jaishri Abichandani

Jaishri Abichandani is a Brooklyn-based artist who, as the founder of the South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC), has been a foundational organizer and arts activist around South Asian diasporic art visibility in the U.S. and Britain. In the series *Jasmine Blooms At Night*, Abichandani fashions portraits of a constellation of feminist leaders in South Asian diasporic communities. The title of her work alludes to Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms At Night*, a novel addressing thematics of diasporic memory, gender identity, and sexual violence against women, one that greatly influenced Abichandani and other activists during the 1990s burgeoning of self-empowerment and organizing within South Asian diasporic women and LGBT2QA communities. The brilliantly hued and glitteringly embellished portraits feature deconstructed and remixed elements of Abichandani’s personal jewelry—imparting a unique preciousness to each work. The artist’s reference to jasmine blooms frames these feminist leaders as under-recognized stars in the night sky.

Saya Woolfalk

Extending her work *Hybrid Digital Space*, a video animation of a domestic interior setting, Saya Woolfalk combines textile patterns from around the world to form an intercultural imagining of an American home. The video is processed through a kaleidoscoping program that remixes the original blend of global influences into a series of stained glass-like projections onto the large-scale interior windows of an AAI studio; Philadelphia-based dancer Annielille Gavino responds to this new digital space. Visitors view the resulting combination of live movement and digital projection from outside of the studio, looking in—reflecting our own everyday encounters with increasingly hybridized physical and digital space.

Laura Kina

Chicago-based artist Laura Kina's three featured paintings are portraits of her child Midori as a baby, at age seven, and again at age twelve, the last documenting Midori's coming out as trans. The center painting, titled *Midori's Brit Brat*, portrays the artist's father holding Midori as a newborn and references the Jewish naming ceremony for newborn girls. The image blends traditional Japanese ukiyo-e prints and Anglo-European painting traditions with a pink background meant to gender the space as female. *Gosei* portrays Midori at age seven, when she began attending Hebrew school and for Kina, a moment she began encountering questions of identity in relation to her mixed-race background. Sensing an emerging melancholy in Midori, Kina painted *Gosei*, which she realized only later captured Midori's emerging gender dysphoria. *End of Summer*, painted a year and a half after Midori came out as trans, features Midori smiling under her new short haircut and wearing a favorite T-shirt. In this work, Kina intentionally references the formal layout of the earlier *Gosei* and has transformed the pink background of *Midori's Brit Bat* into a pink and blue ombré to reflect the trans pride flag.

CYJO

Type features forty of more than one hundred works created for this portrait series by artist CYJO. The series underscores and counters the long legacy of colonial racialization—referencing methodologies of categorization rooted in phrenology and eugenics—structurally embedded within our societal assumptions of race and identity. *Type* leads us back to the humanity of the subject, with the near invisible markers of conventional identification inscribed below their portraits. CYJO notes: “*Type*, a portrait series, questions the human construct of categorizing people based on their physical make-up or background. Our colonial past separated people of different backgrounds, creating hierarchical class systems and unequal socio-economic levels. *Type* confronts this divisive belief by grouping people together who share the same blood type, resulting in diverse groups. These portraits defy the constructed notion that ‘purity of blood’ corresponds to ‘purity of nation, culture or race.’”

*

(ex)CHANGE and *Then and Now* underline the community activism so integral to AAI's work. The artists in these exhibitions actively encourage us to think, feel, and connect, suggesting the radical political possibility that we make change within our humanity.

Over its twenty-five year history, Asian Arts Initiative has thoughtfully forged community among artists and activists and—in presenting and articulating Asian American voices in the arts, such as the diverse exhibiting artists presented here—built lasting solidarities.