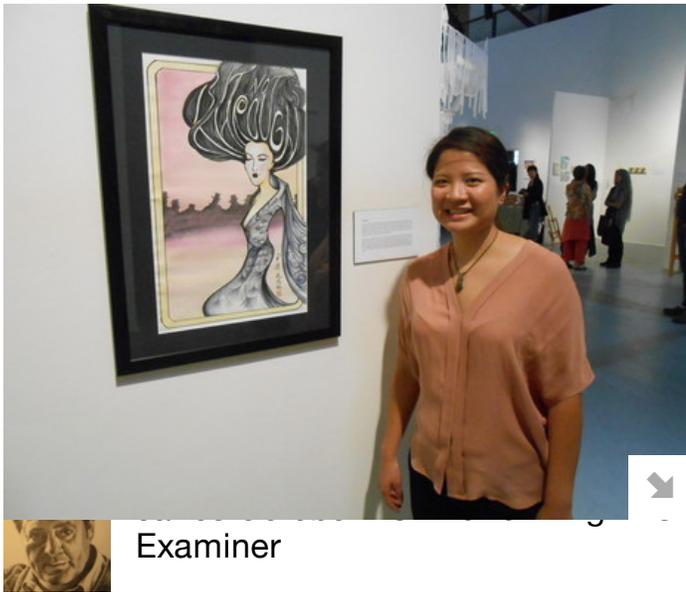


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# Infinite variety of Asian artists

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Examiner

"underCurrents and the Quest for Space"

Rating: ★★★★★

May 5, 2013

If ever an art exhibit proved the point it set out to make, this is it.

With the somewhat awkward title of "underCurrents and the Quest for Space," the show now at the SOMArts Cultural Center

(<http://www.somarts.org/undercurrents/>)

through May 25 aims to counteract

"common stereotypes about Asian

American [women]" and their "continued invisibility" - and does so in eminently visible, tangible, and powerfully communicating ways.

The announcement for the show, presented by the Asian American Women Artists Association and the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center, speaks of the view of Asian women artists as a homogeneous group, but the 30 exhibitors - chosen from about twice that number of applicants - are widely divergent in age, origin, philosophy and, especially to the point, in their works.

While the selecting jury - exhibit curator Inson Choy, Asian Art Museum Director Jay Xu and Mills College professor of arts Mary-Ann Milford - made choices assuring a high standard for the exhibit, the works on view show a great variety, impossible to pigeonhole.

They range from China-born, Potrero Hill resident Li Ma's 10x10x15' fabric installation, a translucent tent without an apparent "message" other than intrinsic beauty, to Taiwanese artist Mido Lee's stunning self-portrait, "Thorns," the photographer portraying herself upside down, in the nude, and with a searing personal statement:

"After 12 years of sexual abuse from members of my family, male bodies have become the forbidden thorns of my life... After years of ineffective psychiatric treatment, I have become a drug addict and an alcoholic. It was not until I moved out from my motherland that I realized the only way to save myself was to look into the source of my problem: men.

"To position male nudes as a female photographer, I finally regain the faith as an able person instead of a helpless victim. Because of the support of these models I can finally pluck the thorns from the wound and live free again."

Abstract art and near-traditional landscapes mix with quirkily individual works, such as first-generation Taiwanese-American Castro resident Cindy Shih's watercolor portrait of a woman entitled "Selfishness," with ink inscriptions.

The work is a parody of and response to Bill O'Reilly statement the "Asian people are not Liberal. They're usually more industrious and hard-working," which Shih says on the label, "reinforces the 'model minority' stereotype and presumes that being Liberal is synonymous with lazy."

There is both national and strong local participation in the exhibit. Among San Francisco participants: Isabelle Thuy Pelaud (Vietnam), Valerie Soe (American-born, from Cantonese family), Xiaojie Zheng (born in Wenzhou), Cynthia Tom (San Francisco-born), Kay Kang (Korea), Choppy Oshiro (from Hawaii, of Japanese origin), Shizuye Seigel (third-generation Japanese American).

Walking around the exhibit, especially striking objects are Judy Shintani's installation of "Unbound Kimonos Deconstructed"; Salma Arastu's dazzling acrylics; Shari Arai DeBoer's semi-abstract etchings/watercolors.

Mitsuko Brooks' prints-and-poems combinations (text by Michele C. Lee and Ono No Komachi) constitute "a discourse on what is to be of the Asian Diaspora. and my personal

experience from growing up in a transnational childhood overseas and in the states, yet never having set foot on my mother's country since I was three years old."

Her series of landscape print series, "Dissonances of the Diaspora," is said by the artist "to depict a hapa woman immersed in constructed landscapes, expressing my feelings of environmental abandonment... of a deep longing to belong to Japan, yet identifying so much with my ingrained American upbringing."

Exhibit-related events at SOMArts Cultural Center include a poetry reading at 7 p.m. May 15, and a panel discussion at 1 p.m. May 25. Events and admission to the exhibit are free. Gallery hours are noon to 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays.