

# **The Four Artists Installations for Metro Poles in Chinatown**

## **THE JOURNEY AT THE CROSSROADS**

**Artists: Olivia Beens, Wan Ling Li, & Angela Valeria**

Artist Olivia Beens transforms a classroom in the Chinatown Manpower office into a unique shrine-like meditative environment. Torso forms will line the walls creating a storyboard for the viewer, much like tablets portraying the “life of Buddha” in a temple. Viewers will be invited to draw on the torso forms marking the artwork with their own images using pencil and oil pastels. Texts, sign and invitations to viewers will be written in English, and Chinese.

This installation piece uses objects found in the streets and parks of New York City. She transforms non-traditional materials into ritualistic, experiential elements inspired by Eastern Art, her own experience as an immigrant and travels abroad. Along life's journey one must make choices; we stop at the crossroads to ponder. The piece invites the viewer to participate and poses the questions;

*Where are you going?*

*Where do you come from?*

*What do you want?*

One never really knows what is at the end of the road. The outcome of ones choices and decisions can only be imagined. The only thing we can count on in life is that there will be change.

The Journey is influenced by Chinatown, the community that I call home and the layers time, of cultures and civilizations I witness on a daily basis. New York City for me is like the cathedral of Hagia Sophia with visible exposed calligraphies, architectural details, and mosaics. Many people in Lower Manhattan are originally from another country with different cultures and experience we share in our daily lives through interactions with others, mostly without realizing it. I want to create a work that reflects this.

Artist Wan Ling Li will add her East/West experience two weeks later by altering the installation. Wan Ling's pieces change over time; they are subtle and experiential, her materials are non- traditional, her point of view conceptual in nature. Her work addresses the dichotomies of the domestic vs. commercial, East vs. West, as well as the hand-made vs. machine-made. Wan Ling's sculptural thread drawings are inspired by watching her grandmother sew as a child and address the notions of what one can control and what is uncontrollable.

Internationally exhibited artist Angela Valeria adds the final touch to the installation in mid-November. Angela's art rises from the sub-conscious in dramatic mythical images seen only in dreams. Her biomorphic figures are painted dyes on cloth hung in unlikely spaces, or videos of repetitive acts that become a meditation on the ephemeral. These

images are inspired by the ancient female deities and began as bird-women. We can only imagine how Angela will respond to the art produced by two other artists.

Also at the Manpower Project, Tamara Gubernat will initiate her group's installation to be reflective of Chinatown using photographs, video, and found objects from the neighborhood.

The Manpower site with viewing hrs are 9 am-5pm, M-F, Sat 9-4pm, is a good example of giving the general public as well as the local Chinatown audience a rare opportunity to witness the process of artistic evolution. Initial installation by the first artist will happen the third week of October 2008. The work will remain unedited and available for public view for an interim period of about 10 to 14 days. After that interim period the next artist will arrive at the site and continue the process of creation and revision, and expand upon the initial artists momentum through addition subtraction, reposition, etc. After a similar interim period of public viewing, the baton is passed to the third artist and the process continues. Olivia Beens will initiate her group's installation with a shrine-like meditative environment. She will transform non-traditional materials and found objects into ritualistic, experiential homage to the crossroads and choices every immigrant journey comes to face.

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#### **Artists: Tamara Gubernat, Laura Chipley & Francisca Caporali**

Also at the Manpower Project, Tamara Gubernat will initiate her group's installation to be reflective of Chinatown using photographs, video, and found objects from the neighborhood. (more will be posted soon.

Until then, see Tamara's film, 'RENT CONTROL: NYC DOCUMENTED AND IMAGINED' on Rezoning Harlem follows longtime members of the Harlem community as they fight a 2008 rezoning procedure. Saturday, October 18th 2008, 7:00 pm at Maysles Cinema - 343 Lenox Avenue/Malcolm X Boulevard at 127th Street)

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#### **"INTERPLAY: THREE ARTISTS, THREE ELEMENTS, THREE SITES."**

**Artists: Wennie Huang, Tamiko Kawata and Katarina Wong**

At the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center the artists will create three simultaneous installations in two buildings of the Center in Chinatown. Drawing on both the Chinese 'Wu Xing' and the Japanese 'Godai' systems of the five elements, their work aims to enhance the healing process with soothing, whimsical and humorous elements.

The Walker St reception area will be devoted to exploring the wood element, whose attributes are strength, flexibility & generosity. The ground floor of the Canal St building would be devoted to water as intelligence, wisdom, flowing, and the formless things in the world. The fourth floor Canal St space would be devoted to air or qi. In the Godai

system, air or wind is an element associated with things that expand and enjoy freedom of movement and qi is associated with the “flow” of energy that sustains all life.

Tying each of these sites together, a small picture book will be available free to patients to read and take. The installations will change as each artist will start and then rotate over the course of the exhibition through the other sites.

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## **AMERICA'S CHINATOWN**

**Artists: Avani Patel and Nathalie Pham**

In America's Chinatown, Avani Patel and Nathalie Pham will create an outdoor installation in the Chatham Green Cooperative, inviting not only local residents but also local school children to think about what Chinatown means to them. What do they love or dislike about their neighborhood? How do they envision their Chinatown? What grievances need to be aired? This is an opportunity for community people to join in creating a reflection in written words and visual form of what is in the minds and hearts of those who live or work in Chinatown.

After September 11, 2001, Chinatown's economy was devastated. Park Row closing to public traffic cut off Chinatown businesses from NY's financial district. Local restaurants suffered and continue to do so as business today is still far below pre 9.11 levels. Yet Chinatown is a special place, an essential Manhattan neighborhood affecting all New Yorkers. Its loss due to gentrification, developers and other such pressures would mean a loss of an essential part of what makes Manhattan great.

To fuel the imagination and revivify the community the youth of Chinatown will create with guidance from their schoolteachers to illustrate their ideas on paper. Even a Chinese superman flying and protecting the underprivileged will not be turned down! The artists will email stories to schoolteachers about the history of Chinatown. The student drawings will be collected, selected, enlarged and painted on out door panels constructed on the front of the Chatham Green Cooperative, right across from the Police barricade blocking Park Row, stay tune for updates. Parents and children are also invited to join both artists each Saturday from 11am to 4 pm starting October 25th to December 13th to paint.

Many local residents speak and read primarily Mandarin, thus the artist Ke Qin Yang will participate, helping to rouse community support and participation. Other artists are also invited to participate and join at any time. How the rest of the NYC feels about Chinatown is important. This will contribute to integrating Chinatown as a participating neighbor in the Lower East Side & its growing art scene. Any input as long as it pertains to the theme American's Chinatown is welcome. A website (link to be announced) with updates is planned.

At the end of the installation will be an auction after December 5, 2008 where all children's work will be sold. The location and time will be announced. The profit will be donated to the Asian American Arts Centre in Chinatown.

This art project is meant to be a reflection on the current situation of Chinatown and be the voice from the community first. The artists take the liberty to over paint any inappropriate artwork within 48 hrs.

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## **AMERICA'S CHINATOWN: A COFFEE SHOP**

**Artist: Yo Park**

**Date: TBA**

In Dec-Jan 2009 or late spring 2009, the artist Yo Park will have a concluding series of events aimed to create greater harmony in the community. A site will be named shortly Stay tuned for updates!

Business owners and residents of Chinatown have been complaining that the Police Dept. blocking of Park Row, a major traffic artery, have caused problems in the flow of customers resulting in considerable loss to business and harm to the local community. The awkward friction and conflicts between the Chinatown community and the Police have been building up since 9.11, 2001. Becoming aware of this site-specific situation, the following interactive project idea involving the collaboration of artists, police and community members has been conceived.

The experimental and mind-expanding character of the MetroPoles Project can make a tremendous contribution to ease the tension between the law enforcement professionals, local business owners and the residents of Chinatown. By creating an impromptu coffee shop, members of the Police Dept and the Community, who have been invited to contribute to the event as managers and servers of the cafe, will add different elements to the situation. Police volunteers will run a one-day per week free coffee shop, serving soft drinks, tea, coffee and simple snacks to the community and the general public.

The purpose of this collective event is to soften the tense relationship between the police and the Chinatown community. Under these unusual circumstances, the usual confrontational stances may dissolve into harmonious relationships and open dialogues. The community will come to understand the protective side of the law enforcement. And the police will be able to share casual and warm moments with the community members, instead of enforcing the law with tickets, clubs and guns. The social and political elements of art have been ignored by the white-cube gallery paradigm. The aim of this socio-political interactive project is to demonstrate the regenerative power of art on human life.

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The Chinatown Manpower Project (CMP) is located at 70 Mulberry St corner of Bayard St. CMP is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the refugee and immigrant population in NYC through training and education programs. Two spaces at CMP, which

will be open to the public M-F during regular business hours, one is a meeting room just off the stairwell, conveniently accessible. The other space is a very large office area with long very visible walls. For more info see [www.cmpny.org](http://www.cmpny.org)

The second site is in CBWCHC - Charles B. Wang Community Health Center at 268 Canal Street & 125 Walker St. This is where many non-traditional viewers will have access to this new form of art innovation. Open public viewing is restricted to three evening dates, with special limited hours to host & welcome public viewing: Oct 27, Nov 12 & Dec 5 at 630pm - 830pm. For more info see [www.cbwchc.org](http://www.cbwchc.org)

Artists will work in rotating shifts, engaging in a collaborative process of creating artwork. The curatorial premise of Metro Poles is to resist commodification of the art object, nurture the creative collaboration between artists and curators, and develop a new curatorial model for the contemporary art market. Curators are: Heng-Gil Han of JCAL, Jose Ruiz of BRAC & Bob Lee of AAAC. Thus over the course of the exhibition artists will revise, add and deconstruct the initial installation. Thus it is recommended for audiences to visit installation sites before the final reception and see the changes by succeeding artists. Creative collaboration will be put forth as an alternative to glamorizing the uniqueness art.

Towards the conclusion of the three-sited installations in Chinatown, a panel talk will convene to assess the questions brought forth by this innovative community/creative process. In mid-January 2009 a concluding talk and reception will take place at Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning encompassing all artists and sites.