

# Moving Pictures

Continued from page 23

Of course, in Portland the options are limited and it's not always a matter of choice. If she had her way, Kristi says she would choose to date primarily people of color so that she could spend less time feeling like a cultural ambassador trying to justify her experience to people whose sense of family and culture are very different.

Although APLG members share quite a few values and experiences, the group—and indeed the term “Asian/Pacific Islander”—embraces more diversity than most people realize. The “Leaving Silence” exhibit is proof: The subjects come from varied educational and occupational backgrounds and range in age from 17 to 59 years; the ethnicities of the eight female, five male and one transgendered interviewees include Bangladeshi, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Iranian, Chinese, Hawaiian, Korean and Thai.

“We don't feel we can represent the whole gay Asian community,” Winata states emphatically.

The exhibit, which grew out of a queer Asian and Pacific Islander visibility project begun in October 1995, was created with funding from the Pride Foundation, the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and numerous smaller organizations. Known as the Oral History Project, it brought together queer Asian and Pacific Islander activists and community leaders from Seattle's pan-Asian International District in an unprecedented collaborative effort, producing a work of art that touches the hearts and lives of people across ethnic boundaries and sexuality categories.

“My experience working for social justice as an out lesbian, feminist environmentalist and daughter of an immigrant has taught me the power of honest communication, and of the mutual respect that people fun-

Top: Tanith Songsook Kimsing and her mother Chong Cha Gluesing; center: Perveen Ali; bottom: Tino Umali

damentally desire,” says Judy Chen, a Leaving Silence Advisory Committee member. “The Oral History Project is a gift, from everyone who has worked on or supported it, to the whole community.”

While the exhibit, which relates the coming-out stories and experiences of 14 interview subjects, is very much about honesty, and while the Oral History Project's brochure on the exhibit calls it “visually stimulating” and states that “modesty is not a concern,” it really doesn't contain anything controversial or risqué—there is no nudity or sexual content in



any of the photos. Still, “Leaving Silence” is likely to make waves because, in the words of Janet L. SooHoo, another advisory committee member, “it challenges Asian communities as well as the straight and gay mainstream communities to acknowledge the true diversity among Asian/Pacific Islanders.”

It is an as-yet unmet challenge, according to the members of Portland's APLG who spoke to *Just Out*. They have encountered marginalization in mixed-race (which in Portland means mostly Caucasian) queer organizations and have struggled against the many misperceptions and stereotypes other people have about Asians and Pacific Islanders.

They say their experiences with APLG, on the other hand, have been much more gratifying. The group, which was founded in 1990, has about 120 people on its mailing list and often attracts many more to events. It is mainly social in function but, Kristi admits, “any gathering of Asian queers is political in itself” because it is still seen as unusual in the eyes of both minority communities.

One thing that wasn't much of a challenge, Kristi says, was obtaining the use of the Multnomah County Justice Center's sidewalk display cases, where “Leaving Silence” will be shown during Portland's Pride festivities.

Graystone Gallery owner Bill Murray, who volunteers time as curator for the space, says that “Leaving Silence” is tastefully designed and much less racy than some of what has been shown previously in the public facility, but that the exhibit might generate some complaints simply because alternative sexual orientations are still a volatile issue.

“Leaving Silence” is not just about encouraging people to come out of the closet—in fact, one of the interview subjects comments on his perception of “coming out” as a white, North American phenomenon. The exhibit is also concerned with the visibility of and solidarity among those who already are open about their sexual orientation, and it represents an effort in self-depiction by a group of people who are often misrepresented by the media of the dominant culture.

“We as gay Asian/Pacific Islanders need to document our own history and experiences,” says Ron Ho, a member of the Leaving Silence Advisory Committee. “It will become educational for all cultures, but could be particularly helpful for those Asians who have gone through the ‘coming out’ process who need support and understanding.”

“Leaving Silence” is on display at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, 5340 N Interstate Ave., through June 19.

It then moves to the Justice Center, 1120 SW Third Ave., where it will be shown from June 21 to July 18.

