

East Meets West

Gay artist creates *China-on-Willamette*

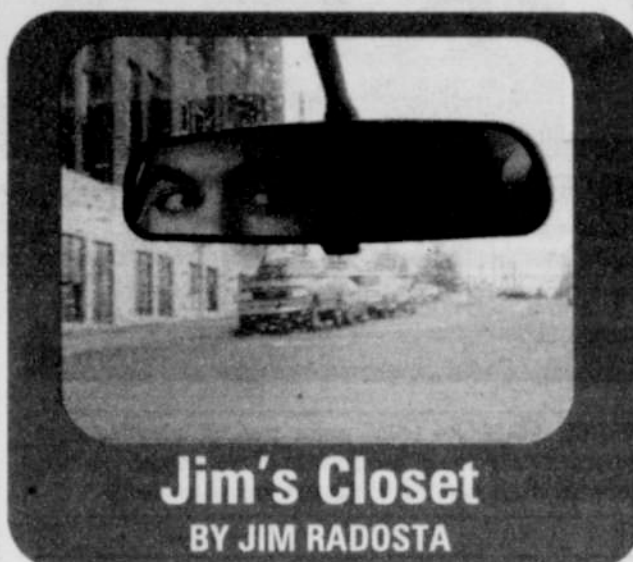
Considering he abandoned medical school to pursue an art career focused on his experience as a Chinese immigrant, Horatio Hung-Yan Law knows plenty about Western vs. Eastern lifestyles.

So it seems appropriate that he's preparing to create *China-on-Willamette*, a three-component piece that will "reimagine what would have happened if the Chinese were allowed to become citizens and allowed to own land" back in the late 19th century. Law, 53, will spend the next month bringing the East to the West as part of the South Waterfront Artist-in-Residence Program, a year-long effort launched last September to inspire Portland residents to explore the different ways neighborhoods come to be.

His residency will take place in the fast-growing SoWa neighborhood (located near the foot of the Portland Aerial Tram) and will consist of two installation projects and a cumulative community performance:

- **Bamboo Great Wall:** To generate chatter about borders, Law will build a 50-foot-long wall in five sections that can be arranged to form a line, zigzag, pentagon and other shapes. "We will move it around...and see how people react to it."

- **Chopsticks Terrace Rice Field:** "Instead of growing real rice, I use green plastic chopsticks...standing on blocks.... I'm going to arrange them to fill in, like, a corner of a building—places where



of San Francisco was burned down and, along with it, a lot of immigration records and birth certificate offices."

Law, who was born in Hong Kong and came to the United States at age 16, has been creating art about immigration since 1993 but admits he was beginning to wonder if there was anything left to say on the subject—that is, until the post-9/11 hysteria set in. He notes that the anti-Chinese sentiment "was very economically motivated. Chinese were able to do better work for cheaper wages.... It's not so different than now.... We think that [Mexicans] are taking jobs away from the residents here. Things don't change very much."

At least Law can say he's witnessed evolution with the integration of Asians into U.S. gay culture. Before moving to Portland in 1994, he recalls a more challenging time.

"Coming out as an Asian man was difficult in the '80s in New York City," Law says. "You'd go to a gay bar, and you were invisible.... At the end of the '80s and beginning of the '90s, I think because of the AIDS crisis, that really pulled the community together."

It was also in the Big Apple where Law made that pivotal switch from science to art. Having earned a biology degree from Johns Hopkins University, he was working as a cancer researcher at Columbia when he decided to take a painting class and had an "epiphany" that led him to explore his life as an immigrant.

"It was not until I studied art that I started bringing back some of these things that have become more important for me, because it defined who I am. You have to look into your past, look into your roots," says Law, who now teaches at Pacific Northwest College of Art. "If you're not making art out of life, then, for me, it doesn't make any sense to do art." 

HORATIO HUNG-YAN LAW presents *China-on-Willamette* from May 3 to 31 at Air Studio, 3623 S.W. River Parkway. The studio will offer free tai chi workshops from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 3, from 10 a.m. to noon May 14 and from 6 to 8 p.m. May 21 and 28; to sign up e-mail horatiolaw@gmail.com. All ages and experience levels are welcome for the closing event and community performance, *Tai Chi for 1,000*, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. May 31 at South Waterfront Park, Southwest Moody Avenue at Curry Street.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. E-mail him at jim@justout.com.



Horatio Hung-Yan Law (inset) created this rendering of *Tai Chi for 1,000*, which will be the culmination of his monthlong residency in SoWa.

people don't expect them to be useful," a subtle message about Chinese resourcefulness.

- **Tai Chi for 1,000:** Law will arrange a group lesson on the Chinese martial art renowned for reducing stress and improving balance. "Even though I don't know how to do tai chi myself, I'm interested in looking at tai chi as a way of forming community, helping people to connect with each other."

Through this diverse approach, Law hopes to teach locals about the lasting influence of Chinese immigrants on where we live today. "The Chinese in Portland were known for clearing the trees around the area so people could build," he says. "They estimate about two-thirds of the trees in the Willamette Valley were cleared by Chinese between 1863 and 1880."

That came to an end when Congress passed anti-Chinese immigration and labor laws that prevented them from becoming citizens, finding jobs and owning land.

"This really discouraged Chinese from settling down anywhere in the United States except for the big Chinatowns in San Francisco and New York," Law says. "But then an act of God sort of created an opportunity for all Chinese: During the [1906] San Francisco earthquake and fire, most

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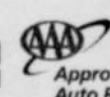
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