

Marginalized communities gain voice with 'zines

By Ryan Nakano
The Asian Reporter

Shortly after the May 26 murders on the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail near the Hollywood Station, “TBH ... I’M AFRAID” was printed on the 10th page of a small publication written by a group of Portland youth working with Asian Leaders for the Liberation of Youth (ALLY), the youth organizing arm of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO).

Front to back, the stapled-and-bound collection of black-and-white photocopied pages of text and illustrations tells a story of safety, oppression, transportation, and solidarity.

When the publication is printed, maybe about 100 copies are made. The publication is an outlet for the Asian-American youth who built it; it is an outlet for their community.

Thus the ALLY 'zine is born just in time for the end of the world, or at least the Portland Zine Symposium (PZS).

On Saturday, July 22, 'zinesters and 'zine enthusiasts will fill the space between the white walls of the old furniture store near the corner of S.E. 82nd Avenue and Division Street, now known as the Jade/APANO Multicultural Space.

For two days starting at noon, the free all-ages event will offer workshops, panels, and tabling exhibitors. It will feature special 'zinester guests Marya Errin Jones and Tonya Jones.

Already flyers have been posted around the streets of Portland — in coffee shops, on community boards, outside a college library — of a printed image of a giant dark blue wave washing over Portland and its bridges which sit at eye level with the words Portland Zine Symposium flagged in grey and black.

This is the work of Vietnamese artist Anna Vo.

“They wanted me to do something post-apocalyptic, but I didn’t want to do



something that was going to continue the narrative that this is the first time we have faced this crisis,” Vo explained. “I wanted to highlight the generational history of Portland being a white space and a place with a history of white supremacy.”

So Vo illustrated a wave, an allusion to the 1948 flooding of what was once the second largest city in Oregon — a large percentage of which were African American.

The city of Vanport was never rebuilt. Vo also illustrated gentrification, burying the phrase *tabula rasa* beneath the crest of an impending natural disaster, depicting the white-washed nature of the city and the manmade disaster that is historical oppression.

Through her work as an activist and creativity as an artist, the New Zealand-born 'zinester successfully illustrates a pre-, present-, and post-apocalyptic landscape for the upcoming 'zine fest.

What started as one of the first major 'zine symposiums in the country in 2001, PZS has continued to grow into a space where people from all kinds of backgrounds and genders — including queer, trans, people of color, indigenous, and others — can feel safe and heard.

In 2015, the symposium underwent a

change of organizers; in the process, it gained several women of color interested in continuing to make PZS as inclusive as possible, including A'misa Chiu.

“I was looking at 'zine culture asking what does it need and I knew it needed more communities of color to be invested. I was tired of critiquing it and thought maybe if I get involved, I can get those people in,” Chiu recalled. “You have to keep doing it over and over again to make it feel inclusive, to flip the script.”

Chiu, a PZS organizer and long-time 'zinester, was first introduced to the art form 10 years ago when she found the first issue of *Giant Robot*, a small, handmade bi-monthly publication featuring Asian pop culture and Asian-American alternative culture.

“I was a dabbling artist at the time and I was like, ‘I can do this,’” Chiu said. “I gathered up stories from friends and collected art for around five months and put out my first issue. As cheesy as it sounds, I felt like I had found my art thing.”

Since then, Chiu has written personal 'zines as well as 'zines of flash fiction, food, family, and her Japanese-American childhood. And 'zines were what landed Chiu with a job and a future career as a

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM. Members of the Asian Leaders for the Liberation of Youth (ALLY), the youth organizing arm of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, attend a recent 'zine workshop held by A'misa Chiu. On July 22 and 23 from noon to 6:00pm, the annual Portland Zine Symposium will take place at the Jade/APANO Multicultural Space, located at 8114 S.E. Division Street in Portland. (Photo courtesy of Asian Leaders for the Liberation of Youth)

librarian.

Chiu, who now works at the Warner Pacific College library, found her calling at the Asian American Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, after asking the librarian at the time to carry her 'zine. On the spot, the librarian offered her a job as a researcher.

If people understand that they can change “from being a consumer to a creator at a young age, the potential is really big for them to start realizing they can affect change by writing down their thoughts or issues through art,” Chiu said. “This is a space where you can share your story, your perspective, and if you don’t feel like you’re listened to or have a voice, this is a space where you can do just that.”

PZS recently received a grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC) to lead workshops for marginalized underrepresented youth through groups such as SMYRC, Brown Girls Rise, and APANO’s ALLY.

Shortly after the May 26 murders on the MAX light rail, “I’M AFRAID BUT I WANT TO BE STRONG” was printed on the ninth page of a small publication produced by a group of Asian-American youth living in Portland.

“The revolution may not be televised,” Chiu said. “But maybe it will be found in 'zines.”

PZS takes place July 22 and 23 from noon to 6:00pm at the Jade/APANO Multicultural Space, located at 8114 S.E. Division Street in Portland. To learn more, call (971) 340-4861, or visit <www.portlandzinesymposium.org> or <www.apano.org>.

Political prisoner, Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo dies at age 61

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some students to leave the square rather than face down the army. The military crackdown killed hundreds, possibly thousands, of people and heralded a more repressive era.

Liu became one of hundreds of Chinese imprisoned for crimes linked to the demonstrations. It was only the first of four imprisonments.

His final prison sentence was for co-authoring “Charter 08,” a document circulated in 2008 that called for more freedom of expression, human rights, and an independent judiciary.

“What I demanded of myself was this: Whether as a person or as a writer, I would lead a life of honesty, responsibility, and dignity,” Liu wrote in “I Have No Enemies: My Final Statement,” which he was prevented from reading aloud at his sentencing in 2009. He was sent to prison for 11 years on charges of inciting subversion by advocating sweeping political reforms and greater human rights in his country.

A year later, he was awarded the Nobel Prize. The Norwegian committee lauded Liu’s “long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China.”

The award enraged China’s government, which condemned it as a political farce. Within days, Liu’s wife, the artist and poet Liu Xia, was put under house arrest, despite not being convicted of any crime. China also punished Norway, even

though its government has no say over the independent Nobel panel’s decisions. China suspended a bilateral trade deal and restricted imports of Norwegian salmon; relations only resumed in 2017.

Dozens of Liu’s supporters were prevented from leaving the country to accept the award on his behalf. Instead, Liu’s absence at the prize-giving ceremony in Oslo, Norway, was marked by an empty chair. Another empty chair was for Liu Xia.

In recent days, supporters and foreign governments urged China to allow him to be treated for cancer abroad, but Chinese authorities insisted he was receiving the best care possible.

The Nobel Committee said Beijing bore a heavy responsibility for Liu’s death. But it also levelled harsh criticism at the “free world” for its “hesitant, belated reactions” to his serious illness and imprisonment.

“It is a sad and disturbing fact that the representatives of the free world, who themselves hold democracy and human rights in high regard, are less willing to stand up for those rights for the benefit of others,” said the organization’s chairwoman, Berit Reiss-Andersen.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Liu Xiaobo was a “courageous fighter for civil rights and freedom of opinion.” Former President George W. Bush saluted Liu as a man who “dared to dream of a China that respected human rights.” U.S.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, meanwhile, urged Beijing to release Liu’s wife from house arrest and allow her to leave the country if she wishes.

Liu was born on December 28, 1955, in the northeastern city of Changchun, the son of a language and literature professor who was a committed party member. The middle child in a family of five boys, he was among the first to attend Jilin University when college entrance examinations resumed after the chaotic 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution.

After spending nearly two years in detention following the Tiananmen crackdown, Liu was detained for the second time in 1995 after drafting a plea for political reform. Later that year, he was detained a third time after co-drafting “Opinion on Some Major Issues Concerning our Country Today.” That resulted in a three-year sentence to a labor camp, during which time he married Liu Xia.

The couple’s friends and supporters described the dissident and his soft-spoken wife as being deeply in love. In the same statement Liu had prepared for his trial, he addressed his wife.

“Your love is the sunlight that leaps over high walls and penetrates the iron bars of my prison window, stroking every inch of my skin, warming every cell of my body, allowing me to always keep peace, openness, and brightness in my heart, and filling every minute of my time in prison

with meaning,” he said.

“But my love is solid and sharp, capable of piercing through any obstacle. Even if I were crushed into powder, I would still use my ashes to embrace you.”

Yu Jie, a longtime friend and a biographer, said Liu frequently gathered a small group of friends for frequent dinners at his favorite local Sichuan hot-pot restaurant, where he regaled younger intellectuals on literature and philosophy before returning home to write until dawn, as was his habit.

“No one was as active as he was, and no one had so much social interaction with the young people,” Yu said. “He was a bridge for generations of thinkers.”

Liu was only the second Nobel Peace Prize winner to die in prison, a fact pointed to by human-rights groups as an indication of the Chinese Communist Party’s increasingly hard line against its critics. The first, Carl von Ossietzky, died from tuberculosis in Germany in 1938 while serving a sentence for opposing Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime.

“Hitler was wild and strong and thought he was right — but history proved he was wrong in imprisoning a Nobel Peace Prize winner,” said Mo Shaoping, an old friend and Liu’s former lawyer. “The authorities consider Liu Xiaobo guilty, but history will prove he is not.”

Bodeen and Wong reported from Beijing. Associated Press researcher Fu Ting and reporter Gerry Shih contributed to this report from Beijing.

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