

“Contemplative Place” by Michihiro Kosuge relocated to Leach Botanical Garden

“Contemplative Place,” an art installation in Portland by Michihiro Kosuge, has been relocated to the Leach Botanical Garden from its previous location at Ed Benedict Park. A public dedication event is scheduled for Friday, September 6 at 10:30am. Attendees are invited to meet the artist and experience the scale and setting of the basalt stone installation in its new forest setting.

Kosuge, who is known for his sculpture and stone installations throughout the Pacific Northwest and beyond, was born in Tokyo and studied sculpture at Tokyo Sumida Technical School of Architecture. After coming to the United States in 1967, he continued to focus on sculpture and earned his Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1970. Kosuge moved to Portland in 1978, where he began teaching at Portland State University. He retired in 2003.

In 1996, Kosuge designed and installed “Contemplative Place,” a striking set of carved and shaped stones in the northwest corner of Ed Benedict Park in east Portland. It was designed to provide a place where park visitors could sit and quietly contemplate the relationship between the massive basalt blocks and the points of the compass marked by the tallest stones.



INSTALLATION RELOCATION. Artist Michihiro Kosuge’s “Contemplative Place” is seen in its new location at Leach Botanical Garden. The art installation has been relocated to the Leach Botanical Garden from its previous location at Ed Benedict Park. A public dedication event is scheduled for Friday, September 6 at 10:30am. (Photo courtesy of the Regional Arts & Culture Council)

The landscaped park setting around the stones worked in concert with the artist’s thoughtful layout to foster a sense of quietude and spirituality. The installation was also meant to provide a spot for 911 call operators — who worked next door in Portland’s Emergency Communications Center — to decompress when needed.

Unfortunately, changes in traffic volume along Powell Boulevard, in addition to the subsequent, ill-considered

placement of a skateboard park directly adjacent to the installation, lead to conditions that worked directly against the artist’s intent.

A major renovation of Leach Botanical Garden, which is currently underway, presented an opportunity to relocate the public art to a spot where it can once again serve its original purpose. The wooded grove that “Contemplative Place” now inhabits allows the installation to work in

concert with its setting.

The Leach Botanical Garden is located at 6704 S.E. 122nd Avenue in Portland. The public dedication event on September 6 is scheduled to take place in the Upper Garden. Due to current construction, parking is limited to the Creekside parking lot. The dedication site can be accessed using the Manor House entrance. To learn more, call (503) 823-1671 or visit <www.leachgarden.org>.

Painter-caste Nepal couple tries saving dying art

By **Nirajan Shrestha**
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Chitrakar families in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu were renowned traditional painters and sculptors who depicted gods and goddesses on temples, masks of Hindu deities, and posters for various religious celebrations.

The art and tradition, however, is dying because of mass machine-printed posters and card-size pictures of gods that are cheaper and more popular. There are just 10 or fewer families now painting in the style, which is denoted by its vivid palette of plant-based paints. New generations of Chitrakars are going into other professions, or leaving Nepal for work or education abroad.

For Chitrakar couple Tej Kumari and Purna, who have been following the tradition at their home in Bhaktapur, a suburb of Kathmandu, it is a struggle to keep the dying art alive against the modern mass-produced prints.

The Chitrakars were given their title, which became their family name, by 14th century King Jayasthiti Malla. Malla classified the Newar ethnic group of Kathmandu under a caste system according to occupations passed down from generation to generation, with different families



taking on roles as priests, artisans, fishermen, cleaners, farmers, traders, and many more. With this, higher and lower castes were also formed.

Nepal history and culture expert Satya Mohan Joshi said there were positive and negative aspects of the system back then.

“The bad thing was it created a basis for discrimination. The good thing was it created expertise in each sector,” he said, allowing the Chitrakar’s distinct painting

style to continue and flourish.

“Even if the painter’s son, a Chitrakar, wanted to do the coppersmith job of a Tamrakar, they weren’t able to,” he said, referring to another Hindu ethnic group. “It is still the same now. But passing these skills on to people from different castes and backgrounds who want to learn the craft could save these traditions.”

Tej Kumari and Purna learned how to paint in the Chitrakar style from their

DISAPPEARING ART. Tej Kumari Chitrakar makes traditional paintings ahead of the Naag Panchami festival at her residence in Bhaktapur, Nepal. Chitrakar families in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu were renowned traditional painters and sculptors who depicted gods and goddesses on temples, masks of Hindu deities, and posters for various religious celebrations. For Tej Kumari and her husband, it is a struggle to keep the dying art alive against mass machine-printed posters. (AP Photo/Nirajan Shrestha)

fathers and grandfathers, knowledge passed down over generations. However, they are not sure if the next generation will continue the tradition. Their two sons work in business but their third son is showing some interest in learning the trade.

While painting snake gods for the Hindu festival of Naag Panchami, Tej Kumari recalled days when she would make thousands of posters for people to paste on their doors in August. This year she made only about 50.

She said machine-printed ones have gained popularity, leading to a drastic reduction in the number of customers. Many of the older generation who appreciated the art form have died.

“It is a craft I have known and practiced for ages,” she said. “If anyone in Nepal would like to learn it and keep the culture alive, I would happily teach them.”

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