

Call for Papers

Representations of East Asian Migrants and Settlers in the Western United States ca. 1850-1929

Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman, MT

26-28 September 2024

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the empires of China, Japan, and Korea, took dissimilar approaches to diplomacy with the colonial powers of Western Europe and America: most scholar-officials in Beijing advised various Qing emperors and the Empress Dowager to reject Western technology, education, and values in the interest of preserving traditional hierarchies; most officials and oligarchs in Tokyo counselled the Meiji emperor to embrace Western technology, law, and education in order to secure Imperial Japan's future as a global power; and most courtiers in Seoul sought to defend the Yi dynasty of Chôson from the expansionist encroachments of the Japanese and Russian empires. As the republic of the United States expanded westward over indigenous and Mexican lands to reach the Pacific, the annexed territories became widely known as places of opportunity for those in search of plentiful work, affordable lodging, and community development. The American West became a magnet for the poorest migrants and immigrants of the northeastern urban corridor of the United States and the southern rural districts of China, Japan, and Korea.

As peoples of European and Asian origin converged on the American West, tensions emerged over access to opportunities within the burgeoning mining, transport, and service economies. Euro-Americans' domination of state and national governments ensured that members of their ethnicity would typically be favored in business, investment, and labor disputes, while Asian Americans would ordinarily be subjected to crippling taxes, immigration bans, and discriminatory treatment. This flagrantly inequitable situation found expression in artistic representations of Asian migrants and settlers, whether images of minorities going about their daily lives, being driven away from towns and camps, or offering protest and resistance to maintain livelihoods.

This conference on the theme of Representations of East Asian Migrants and Settlers in the Western United States ca. 1850-1929 provides scholars from universities, museums, libraries, and archives an opportunity to exchange research on the ways Asian American and Euro-American artists represented Asian migrants and settlers in art during the period between the Gold Rush and the Great Depression. Over the last thirty years, historians have probed Asian American migrants' experiences of work, settlement, and discrimination in the mining and railroad towns of the West—while art historians have explored Euro-American artists' attraction to Asian styles and themes as catalysts for the formal transformation of art on the East Coast and Asian American artists' production of original works rooted in transnational dialogues, aesthetic choices, and social experiences on the West Coast. This conference builds on these scholarly trends by ascertaining how Asian and European artists who journeyed through or resided in the American West between 1850 and 1929 contributed to a rich array of representations of Asian sojourners and settlers in different genres (e.g. documentary, picturesque, academic, expressive, illustrative, satirical) that promoted a range of views (e.g. ethnographic, nationalistic, empathetic, propagandistic, associational, filial, ethnic, gendered). We welcome paper proposals that illuminate not only how Euro-American artists imposed naturalized, stereotyped, racist, and other identities but also how Asian American artists and individuals deflected, contested, or rejected such images to constitute their own identities.

Art occupied an important position in the lives of “Asian Americans” and “Euro-Americans” inhabiting “the West” and therefore serves as a crucial site for probing encounters between individuals and communities. How do we appreciate the geographies, nations, ethnicities, identities, viewpoints, experiences, and interests at work and the power dynamics and ideological investments at play in commissioning, making, exhibiting, and viewing art during this formative period of migration and settlement? How did citizens of diasporas and their progeny self-identify or understand themselves in relation to transnational spaces—for example, as Hongkongese, Chinese, Asian, Asian American, or Californian—and what artistic formats, styles, and approaches were employed to convey that identification? What kinds of narratives emerged—of the relationship of Asian migrants to the geographies of land, roads, and towns; of the competition between Asian and European immigrants for jobs in labor, transportation, and commerce; of discrimination against Asian migrants by local, state, and national authorities; of Asian resilience, adaptation, protest, and legal challenge?

Program: In the first half of the conference, “Daily Life in the West,” participants will discuss images of Asian migrants and immigrants in contexts of work, leisure, worship, or celebration; in the second half of the program, “Contested Claims,” participants will discuss representations of Asians in contexts of discrimination, scapegoating, and violence as well as strategies employed to overcome these circumstances in the form of community organization, public protest, and legal application. On the last day, “Modern and Contemporary Artists,” scholars will reveal how the earliest migrants and settlers constructed identities to negotiate their new surroundings and Asian American artists will share how they have engaged with, referenced, or distanced the past from their unique experiences as generational, transnational, expressive, and/or activist individuals.

There will be eight sessions, each chaired by a distinguished scholar, comprised of three to four participants, and lasting approximately two hours. The following themes and iconographic groups, culled from the holdings of state and national museums, libraries, and archives, are provided only to stimulate topics.

Daily Life in the West – Thursday, 26 September 2024

1. Labor: In the Mines, on the Rails, in the Fields, and in the Markets. Chairs: Todd Larkin and Hua Li, Professor of Art History and Professor of Modern Language & Culture, School of Art, 213 Haynes Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717, tlarkin@montana.edu or huali@montana.edu

This session will focus on images of Asian and Asian American business owners, contractors, and laborers at work extracting minerals, cultivating the land, building transportation networks, and purveying a range of goods and services (e.g., Thomas Hill, *Irrigating Strawberries at a Farm*, ca. 1865).

2. Leisure: On the Streets, at Restaurants, and in Homes. Chair: Diana Greenwold, Lunder Curator of American Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1050 Independence Ave SW, Washington DC 20560, GreenwoldD@si.edu

This session will treat with images of Asians or Asian Americans frequenting shops, conversing in restaurants, and conferring with colleagues in lodgings, or interacting with family in homes. (e.g., Theodore Wores, *Chinese Restaurant*, 1884).

3. Worship and Celebration: At Shrines and Temples, Festivals and Funerals. Chair: William Ma, Assistant Professor of Art History, School of Art, College of Art & Design, 102 Julian T. White Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, williamma1@lsu.edu

This session will examine images of individual or collective ceremony as evoked by religious rituals honoring Daoist and Buddhist deities or festivities marking the Lunar New Year, the emperor's birthday, and Tomb Sweeping Day (e.g., Toshio Aoki, *Untitled (Thunder Kami)*, ca. 1900).

Contested Claims – Friday, 27 September 2024

4. Discrimination: The “Yellow Peril” or “Asian Progress” Represented in the American Press. Chair: Edward Tang, Professor and Chair, Department of American Studies, 101 tenHoor, Box 870214, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0214, etang@ua.edu

This session will address American newspaper articles and gazette features (many of them illustrated) that played on popular fears and prejudices to convey untruths or stereotypes about Asian migrants and settlers as well as efforts to offer counter narratives and to establish foreign language news networks for specific communities (e.g., “The Chinese New Year Commences at Midnight,” *Butte Miner*, 1902).

5. Violence: Scapegoating, Arson, and Murder. Chair: William Wei, Professor of History, Department of History, 234 UCB, University of Colorado, Boulder CO 80309-0234, william.wei@colorado.edu

This session will examine Euro-American strategies and techniques employed (many of them represented in prints) to intimidate Asian migrants and settlers into abandoning their claims, jobs, homes, communities, and cultural practices in the West as well as efforts to join associations, to appeal to authorities, and to seek legal remedies to discourage or counter such threats (e.g., Thure de Thulstrup, “The Massacre of the Chinese at Rock Springs,” *Harper's Weekly*, 1885).

6. From Periphery to Center: Minorities in Dialogue or Juxtaposition. Chair: Emily C. Burns, Director of the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West and Associate Professor of Art History, School of Visual Arts, 520 Parrington Oval Rm 202, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK 73019, emily.burns@ou.edu

This session will discuss how Asian immigrants were represented along with American indigenous, Afro-Americans, and Hispanic Americans in ways that stressed similar interests or experiences as minorities negotiating the culture of the Euro-American majority (e.g., Thomas Nast, “Every Dog (No Distinction of Color) Has His Day,” *Harper's Weekly*, 1879).

Modern and Contemporary Artists – Saturday, 28 September 2024

7. Integral Identities: Asian Strategies of Self-Representation in the Old West. Chair: Doris Sung, Assistant Professor of Asian Art, Department of Art and Art History, 301 Garland Hall, Box 870270, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, dhsung@ua.edu

Several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Asians who travelled through or settled in the West employed strategies of self-representation or collaborative representation that deflected, questioned, or came to terms with the challenge of living, working, assembling, and interacting in a new, unfamiliar, and at times hostile environment. (e.g., Lai Yong, *Self-Portrait as an Artist*, 1871; Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Self-Portrait as a Golf Player*, 1927).

8. Past as Prologue: Asian American Artists Today. Chair: Bert Winther-Tamaki, Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, Department of Art History, Humanities Gateway 2210, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697, dewinthe@uci.edu

Several contemporary Asian American artists have referenced, reframed, or rejected the past in their works, providing essential perspectives on how their lived, intellectual, and creative experiences of America and/or Asia have developed over time. (e.g., Stephen Young Lee, *Vase with Landscape and Dinosaurs*, 2014; Yowshien Kuo, *Faces of Death*, 2018; Dominique Fung, *Look Steadily and Intently*, 2021)

Location: The conference will take place in the Hager Auditorium of the Museum of the Rockies at Montana State University, on 26-28 September 2024. The event co-organizers, Todd Larkin and Hua Li, encourage participation from North American and Asian scholars from university, museum, or archival backgrounds who can illuminate patronage motivations, artistic approaches, and interpretive challenges to representing an East Asian presence in Western America during a time of great productivity. The Terra Foundation of American Art, in partnership with the Montana State University Alumni Foundation and the Museum of the Rockies, are pleased to support this international event.

Submission: Please send a 450-word abstract and 2-page curriculum vitae to the appropriate session chairperson by **15 October 2023**. Your abstract should identify the title of the paper, articulate a central issue or problem, and explain the sources and/or methods that will be used to address it. Your curriculum vitae should include the university where you obtained your advanced degree, your major research area(s) and representative publication(s), and your current institutional affiliation and rank. The session chairs will respond to your proposal by 15 December 2023. All other inquiries about the conference, program, and publicity may be directed to: Todd Larkin and Hua Li, C/O Department of Art History—School of Art, 213 Haynes Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman MT 59714. Phone: (406) 994-2720 or (406) 994-6449, Email: tlarkin@montana.edu or huali@montana.edu.