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RICHMOND ART GALLERY School Art Program



Teacher Guide

Karen Tam: *With wings like clouds hung from the sky*

May 4 - June 30, 2019

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Program Overview

Dear Teachers,

This guide contains information about the exhibition, the artists, and some classroom activities that will help you to prepare your students for their visit to the Richmond Art Gallery. Please review this package with your students to get the most out of your gallery visit. The suggested activities require a minimum of materials and are adaptable to the needs of different grade levels.

Throughout the guide you will find art vocabulary words in bold that are defined in the vocabulary section, and resource links have been included for further topic explorations.

Program Goals

The goals of the gallery tour and art workshop are to encourage students to:

- Describe and respond to works of art and explore artists' intent
- Observe and share how artists use processes, materials, technologies, tools, and techniques to express ideas
- Explore connections to identity, place, culture, and belonging through creative expression
- Examine the relationship between art and the wider world
- Create artworks using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, experimentation, and purposeful play

Big Ideas explored

- Creative expression is a means to explore and share one's identity within a community
- People connect to others and share ideas through the arts
- Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives
- Works of art influence and are influenced by the world around us
- Artistic expressions differ across time and place
- Experiencing art challenges our point of view and expands our understanding of others
- Engagement in the arts creates opportunities for inquiry through purposeful play.
- Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities.

Before Your Visit

Background: Who was Lee Nam?

In this exhibition, artist Karen Tam invites us to step back in time and enter the painting studio of a young Chinese-Canadian painter named Lee Nam. Nam lived in Victoria, BC in the 1930s and had trained in traditional Chinese brush painting. Seeking to learn more about the European traditions of painting, he sought out local artists from whom he could learn more. Living in Victoria at that time was the artist Emily Carr who wrote the following of her first meeting with Lee Nam:

A young Chinese came to my door carrying a roll of painting. He had heard about the exhibition, had come to show his work to me – beautiful watercolours done in Oriental style. He was very anxious to carry his work further ... I invited him to show in place of the flower painter and he hung a beautiful exhibition. (Carr, The House of All Sorts)

A friendship formed between the artists, and it is clear from her writings that while Nam wanted to study Western art styles, she herself was impressed with his work and wanted to learn Chinese techniques. She wrote of exchanging artworks with him, and an unsigned ink brush painting of chickens was found among her possessions and is quite possibly one of these exchanged paintings.

All mentions of Lee Nam then cease, with his name disappearing from her journals as suddenly as they appeared. Some believe that he may have returned to China, while others hypothesize that they simply lost touch. Other than the mentions in Emily Carr's journals, there are no records of this unknown artist. Karen Tam's exhibition invites us to consider the lives of individuals like Lee Nam, whose biographies go unrecorded by official histories, and yet whose lives equally contribute to the Canadian experience.

Discussion: Who do we remember, and why?

Before visiting the gallery, you may want to get your students to think about:

What is history? Why is it important?

How does someone become famous in history?

Who writes history? Why do they write it?

Who is not included in history? Why might that be?

How has our understanding of Canadian history changed in recent years? Why did this change happen?

How do you think our stories will be represented as history in future years? What do you think might be missing and why?

At the Gallery

Your visit will start with a gallery tour of our current exhibition *With wings like clouds hung from the sky*. During the tour we will explore Karen Tam's immersive **installation**, discuss the history of **Chinese Brush Painting**, and contemplate the creative exchange of ideas between Lee Nam and Emily Carr. We will examine the works of other Chinese-Canadian painters, and compare the distinctive **Gongbi** and **Xieyi** traditions of painting.

After the tour, we will go into the gallery classroom and students will have the opportunity to explore the materials, tools, and techniques used in traditional Chinese Brush Painting. We will first focus on mark making and ways to create different kinds of lines by experimenting with different brush strokes.

Students will be guided through creating a simple landscape with black, expressive lines, inspired by the traditions of Chinese **Shan Shui** paintings. To complete the landscape, students will add colour with watercolour paint, exploring various techniques such as dry brush and washes. Workshop instruction, materials and tools used are tailored for age and grade level of students.

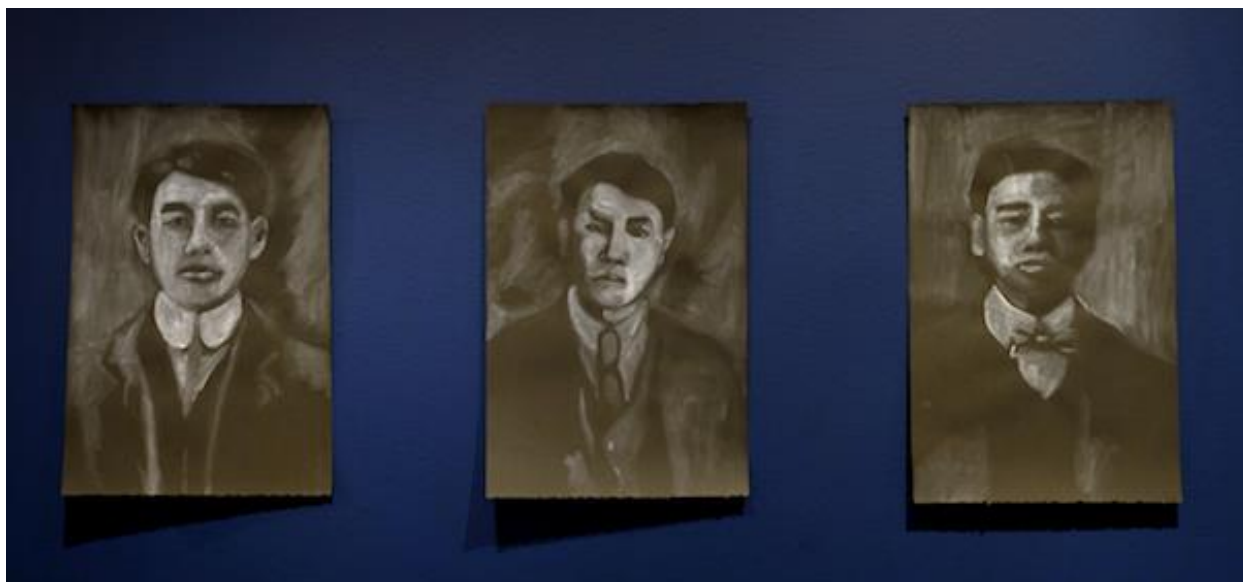


About The Exhibition

Organized in partnership with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, *With wings like clouds hung from the sky* is an **installation** by Montreal-based artist Karen Tam. Since 2014, Tam has researched artist Lee Nam: a Chinese immigrant to British Columbia in the early 20th century, and a friend and colleague of Canadian painter Emily Carr. Tam re-imagines Lee Nam's painting studio, on Cormorant Street in Victoria's Chinatown, to evoke the presence of this unknown artist and to invite the viewer to speculate about his influence on Carr's approach to painting in the mid- 1930s.



In early 2019, Tam made a research visit to the Lower Mainland to learn about and meet with the local ink brush painting community. The works she selected to include in this exhibition show direct connections to the teachers and stylistic legacies of both Lee Nam and Chinese painting in Canada. These beautiful and delicate paintings highlight trans-national lineages of artists and the contemporary work of Chinese- Canadian artists. Tam's exhibition highlights the influences of East and West that shaped the context that Lee Nam and Emily Carr painted in, while also opening up a broader dialogue with immigrant artistic experience in Canada. Tam's work is unique in its sincere outreach and conversation with inter-generational and multilingual artists, connecting contemporary and traditional forms in dialogue.



In addition to the installation and painted works by Chinese-Canadian artists, Tam has included a series of sketches to help further evoke the memory of Lee Nam. She researched all occurrences of the name “Lee Nam” and created sketches of the photos from identity papers bearing that name. However, one of the major challenges facing anyone researching Chinese-Canadian history is the lack of accurate records. Many Chinese immigrants moved back and forth between China and Canada, and sometimes identity documents were exchanged or sold to others to circumvent discriminatory immigration policies. The result of this is that many immigrants were known by these “paper names” in Canada, and no record of their actual identity exists. Whether or not any of these images is the true face of this unknown artist may never be known because of this. What the images do provide, however, is a glimpse into the lived experiences of the Chinese-Canadian community in the early 20th century.



The final part of the exhibition is a collaborative piece entitled *Like rain drops rolling down new paint* inspired by the single sketch of a chicken owned by Emily Carr, and possibly painted by Lee Nam. Hanging over the gallery floor are hundreds of ink brush paintings of birds, accompanied by a workshop zone where gallery visitors are encouraged to try their hand at brush painting themselves, and to leave a painting that will be hung with the others.

About The Artist

Karen Tam is an artist whose research focuses on the various forms of constructions and imaginations of cultures and communities, through her installation work in which she recreates spaces of Chinese restaurants, karaoke lounges, opium dens, curio shops and other sites of cultural encounters. Since 2000, she has exhibited her work and participated in residencies in North America, Europe, and China, including the Deutsche Börse Residency at the Frankfurter Kunstverein (Germany), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (Canada), and CUE Art Foundation (USA). She was a finalist for the Prix Louis-Comtois in 2017 from the Contemporary Art Galleries Association and the Ville de Montréal, a finalist for the Prix en art actuel from the Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec in 2016, and long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2016 and 2010. Her works are in museum, corporate, and private collections in Canada, United States, and United Kingdom.

Tam lives and works in Montréal and holds a MFA in Sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a PhD in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths (University of London). She is a contributor to Alison Hulme's (ed.) book, *The Changing Landscape of China's Consumerism* (2014) and to John Jung's book, *Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurant* (2010). She is represented by Galerie Hugues Charbonneau.

Karen Tam's Website: www.karentam.ca



After Your Visit

Traditional Chinese painters sign their works with a seal, which is a stamp carved in soapstone (a soft, easy to carve stone found in Southern China). These seals are like the signature on a European painting, a way of identifying the artist who created the artwork. The seal would often be the name of the artist, but some artists also used message seals consisting of a saying or phrase that was personally meaningful or that contributed to the interpretation of the painting.

To sign the painting, the seal would be pressed into a dish of red printing paste made from cinnabar, and then carefully pressed into the paper to create a clear impression.

For a history of the Chinese seal, check out this short video by Unesco
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8nBkIOES04>

Activity: Make your own seal

Finish your landscape painting by adding a personal seal.

You will need:

Craft foam
Pencil
Old cork
Red stamp pad



Procedure:

1. Create a design for your seal. You could try combining your initials in a creative way, or choosing a simple line drawing. Once designed, create a mirror image of your design to transfer onto the foam.
2. Draw the mirrored design onto a piece of craft foam, pressing down hard enough to create grooves in the foam. These lines will appear white while the background will appear red in your printed seal.
3. Glue the craft foam onto an old cork or other firm handle (wooden block, wooden spool, etc.). Trim any excess around the design if needed.
4. Press your seal into the red stamp pad and do a few test stamps. The seal may need to be used a few times to build up enough ink on the foam. If the lines of your design are not clear, go over them again to make them deeper with the pencil.
5. Once you are happy with how your seal looks, stamp it on your landscape painting.



Extension Activity: Calligraphy, Poetry, & Painting

Painting was not always seen as a separate art form in the history of Chinese Art. Often, painting was (and still is) combined with the art of poetry, written in elegant calligraphy. The combination of these three art forms, painting, poetry, and calligraphy in a single unit is called the “three perfections”. The effectiveness and beauty of this combination can be seen in *Fisherman* by Wu Zhen, (pictured above) completed in 1350s. The poem reads:

*Red leaves west of the village reflect evening rays,
 Yellow reeds on a sandy bank cast early moon shadows.
 Lightly stirring his oar,
 Thinking of returning home,
 He puts aside his fishing pole, and will catch
 no more.*

To complete your landscape painting, write a short poem about your scene, possibly imagining what you would see, hear, and feel in this landscape. Is there an animal that lives in this landscape? What time of day or season is it? Once your poem is complete, write it out carefully, or using a computer, choose an elegant font and layout for your poem. Mount the painting and the printed poem onto a larger paper or paper scroll. Adding to an original painting in this way was commonly done when poems and dedications were added at a later date.

Resources

Online

Digital Chinese brush painting activity <http://education.asianart.org/brushpainting/>

Excellent handouts on brushstrokes and dots used in Chinese Brush Painting
<http://education.asianart.org/sites/asianart.org/files/resource-downloads/Chinese%20Brushstrokes%20Vocabulary%20%28AAM%29.pdf>

Article on the history of Chinese Brush Painting
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chin/hd_chin.htm

China Online Museum – Source of good images of historical Chinese Paintings
<https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/>

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria exhibition page aggv.ca/exhibits/archive/karen-tam/

Galleries West article www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/karen-tam-s-chinatown-studio/

Books

An introduction to Traditional Chinese Painting by He Hanqiu and Deng Jun

Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr by Robin Laurence

Brushstrokes: Styles and techniques of Chinese Painting by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Chinese Painting by James Cahill

Techniques of Chinese Painting by Wu Yangmu

The How and Why of Chinese Painting by Diana Kan

The Painter's Practice: How artists lived and worked in Traditional China by James Cahill

The Simple Art of Chinese Brush Painting by Qu Lei Lei

The Three Perfections by Michael Sullivan

Glossary

Chinese Brush Painting

Painting in the traditional Chinese style is done with a brush dipped in black or colored inks or watercolours, and painted on absorbent paper or silk. Can be done in many formats, including single sheets, hanging scrolls, and hand scrolls.

Contemporary Art

Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.

Gongbi

This style of painting was developed in the Song and Five Dynasty period. Also called the Academic or Meticulous style, this approach to painting concerns itself with beauty and appearance, and is extremely detailed and realistic. Paintings are often nature studies, and the focus is on creating peaceful, elegant, tranquil images.

Installation Art

An artwork that is created in order to transform a space and place that directly involves the viewer. It uses almost any media (sculpture, video, paint, etc.) to create a sensory and/or conceptual experience in a particular environment. Often, the gallery space is used directly in the installation.

Landscape

A genre of art whose subject is the natural environment. Chinese Landscape Painting is often referred to as **Shan Shui**, literally meaning “mountain water” as these two features were always present in landscape paintings.

Literati

A well-educated class of people well versed in literature, philosophy and the arts. In traditional Chinese culture, the Scholar Officials were a very influential group of literati who served as administrators under the ruling emperors.

Xieyi

Also known as the **Literati** style, Xieyi literally means to “write ideas” The objective of this style is not to portray objects realistically but through the play of brush and ink to use the painting to show the artist’s emotions and philosophical ideas.

Image Credits

Cover, page 6, 7, 8, 9 : Karen Tam, *With wings like clouds hung from the sky*, 2017, as installed at The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC.

Page 5: Karen Tam, *Flying Cormorant Studio (For Lee Nam)*, 2014, as installed at the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK.

Page 7: Karen Tam, *Like rain drops rolling down new paint*, 2017, as installed at The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC.

Page 10: Wu Zhen, *Fisherman*, c.1350 (Public Domain)

School Program Supporters and Partners



The Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program is one of many gallery programs made possible by the Richmond Art Gallery Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to extending the reach of our gallery exhibitions through community programming.



www.islbus.com

International Stage Lines is making it possible for more schools to visit by donating free bus travel to and from the gallery. Find out more about this at <http://www.richmondartgallery.org/learn-and-create/schools/elementary>



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