

RAG

RICHMOND ART GALLERY

Evan Lee

Elders and Roots

April 27 – June 15, 2014



Evan Lee, *Ginseng Root Studies* (series), Archival Pigment Print, 2005,
Courtesy of the artist and Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver

School Art Program Teacher's Guide

About the Exhibition

Elders and Roots features many artworks that, on first glance, seem very different from each other. There is a series of images of ginseng roots, which look like photographs. Next is a series of pencil sketches of elderly Chinese women walking, working and resting in the streets Vancouver. And finally there is a video of an elderly South Asian man working at a house that is under construction in a Vancouver neighbourhood. But if we look closely, we can find connections between all these artworks. These connections are in the themes of the artworks, the ways in which each was created, and in visual similarities between the images themselves.



Evan Lee, *Ginseng Root Studies* (series of 36),
Archival Pigment Print, 2005



Evan Lee, *Old Women* (series of 36),
Pencil on paper, 2007

The ginseng root is a renowned and prized Chinese medicinal plant. It is revered for its healing properties, its high monetary value and the fact that the roots appear to look like people. The name ginseng actually means “person-root”, and ginseng’s resemblance to the human form is celebrated in Chinese folklore. When the artist was a child, his parents would point out the various human-like figures as they passed the ginseng on display in Chinatown’s shop windows, and it was that memory that inspired Evan Lee to create these artworks. And it is that visual similarity to people that connects the ginseng images to the *Old Women* images. The poses and

attitudes of the old women portrayed in the pencil sketches is mirrored in the frail, humanlike forms of the ginseng roots. The ginseng and the women are isolated on the page, with no distracting backgrounds, which invites us to look more closely at each one and celebrates the individuality of each woman and each root.



Evan Lee, *Manual Labour* (still), Video, 2006 (duration 05m 31s, continuous loop)

Each artwork has a connection to photography, but is not a photograph itself. To create the *Ginseng Root Series*, Evan Lee used a flatbed **scanner** instead of a camera, so the images are **scanner** “captures”, not photographs. The *Old Women* series of drawings started out with a series of photos that were taken in and around Vancouver, and each sketch was drawn from an original photo. *Manual Labour* appears to be a video, however when you look closely, you will notice that it is actually made up of individual photos, so it is really more like a photo “slide show” than a video. The photographs used to create the **video artwork** were taken through a crack in a garage wall across from the property under construction. The artist likes to experiment with the medium of photography, and to push the boundaries of how to create or “capture” images with and without a camera. Lee also likes to create artworks in which ‘things are not what they appear to be.’



Balthasar van der Ast, *Basket of Fruits*, 1622

The idea of “capturing” or freezing a moment in time has a long tradition in art history, especially among still life painters, and Evan Lee is referencing the work of the Dutch still life painters of the 17th century with his scanner “captures”. These painters were masters at creating the illusion of reality in their artwork. The name “still life” refers to the fact that often the objects painted were natural or living objects, such as fruit or flowers, so by capturing them in paint, they are being “frozen in time” or kept “still”. Although the items depicted in still life paintings seem to be everyday, ordinary items, they often had symbolic meanings attached to them. For example, each flower in the painting would represent a different virtue or emotion; the Lily represented purity, the rose represented love, the tulip represented nobility, and the violet represented modesty. Evan Lee has chosen for his subject what seems to be an ordinary item, a ginseng root, but it too has layers of personal meaning from his childhood memories, and cultural meanings from its role in Chinese medicine and folklore. Capturing the ginseng roots using a scanner produces an image that mirrors the luminous light effects and emphasis on detail and texture of the Dutch still life paintings. The dark backgrounds of both the paintings and the prints create a strong contrast to the highlights and light effects of the objects depicted, and further serve to draw our eye to the subject of the artwork.



Maria van Oosterwijk, *Vase of Tulips, Rose, and Other Flowers with Insects*, 1669



Evan Lee, *Old Women* (series of 36),
Pencil on paper, 2007

The themes in the exhibition are hinted at in the exhibition title, *Elders and Roots*. *Elders* is referring to the *Old Women* series, and *Roots* to the *Ginseng Root Studies*. The word roots however, can also refer to our family or ancestral background, and the elders of a community are also its roots. Ginseng roots are an important medicinal plant in Chinese medicine, and are highly prized, some roots costing thousands of dollars. By comparing community elders to this important plant, Evan Lee is encouraging us to take a closer look at how we value and prize our own “roots”, our elders. The elderly people that appear in the *Old Women* series and the **video art** piece

Manual Labour, illustrate the plight of those who have immigrated to Canada and who can end up on the sidelines of society, or who are limited to doing manual work. Migration, or global movement is also expressed in the use of ginseng as a **subject**, as ginseng has been harvested in North America and traded to China for hundreds of years. All three bodies of work shown here are **portraits** and through this selection of **subjects** Lee is saying that beautiful forms in nature, the elderly, and the dignity of manual labour, all deserve to be memorialized in art.

Further Reading and Resources

Want to see more work by Evan Lee? Check out his website: <http://evanlee.ca>

Hear from the artist himself! Check out a video interview with Evan Lee:
<http://www.richmondartgallery.org/downloads.php>

Interested in learning more about the history of ginseng? Check out this video from the American Ginseng Museum: <http://americanginsengmuseum.com/history-map-and-film/>

Want to learn more about the history of still life painting? Check out:
<https://www.nga.gov/kids/DTP6stillife.pdf>

About the Artist

Evan Lee received his Masters Degree in Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia in 2000. He is known for his experimental photo-based work but also works across a range of media and subjects. He has exhibited his work locally, nationally, and internationally, and was long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2009 and 2014. His work has also been featured and reviewed in art magazines such as *Border Crossings* and *Canadian Art*. Lee has taught at the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design and in the Department of Fine Arts at UBC, and has served on the Board of Directors of Centre A. Lee is represented by Monte Clark Gallery.

Evan Lee's Website: <http://evanlee.ca>

About the Guest Curator

Bill Jeffries has curated 140 art exhibitions since 1983. He works as a freelance writer, lecturer, artist and environmental activist. He was the owner of the Coburg Gallery in Vancouver from 1983 to 1987, which was, at that time, the only privately-owned photography gallery in the Lower Mainland. In 1984 he founded the Canadian Photographic Portfolio Society, which continues to operate today, and from 1988 to 1991 he was Director /Curator at the Contemporary Art Gallery. From 1998 to 2001 he worked in a variety of registration positions at the Vancouver Art Gallery. He was Director/Curator at Presentation House Gallery from 2001 to 2005, and held the same post at the Simon Fraser University Galleries from late 2005 until the end of 2012. He has texts in over 20 published books. Bill has a BA from Jersey City State College, a BFA from the University of British Columbia and an MA from Simon Fraser University. He is currently curating, and making art, directing a feature film project and trying to learn cross-country skiing.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Activity: Still Life Drawing – Drawing from Observation

A **still life** is an artwork that features inanimate objects, typically everyday things such as flowers, food, bowls, and vases. The still life genre was ideal for artists to practice drawing from observation, and for controlling the composition of their artwork because they could control the arrangement of the items. To prepare, show students examples of still life artworks and discuss the types of objects that are being shown, and how these objects are arranged. Notice how the items are grouped together, overlapped, and placed at different heights to create a balanced composition. Ask students to each choose an item to create a classroom still life.

Set up a table for the objects, and have some boxes or books handy to use for arranging objects at different heights. Have students arrange their objects, encouraging them to try different groupings and overlapping arrangements. For younger students, create several simpler groupings with fewer objects.

When drawing from observation, the most important thing is to spend time looking at what you are drawing. Before you draw the still life, try these quick, warm up exercises:

1. Do a blind contour drawing. Students will not look at their paper, but instead only look at the objects, and draw the outline of the objects. Demonstrate this first, show students how slowly your pencil is moving, how you are not looking down at your paper, and show students that the finished drawing will not look real, in fact it will look very strange! The point is to go slowly and get practice looking. To encourage students to slow down, have them imagine that their eyes are a tiny ladybug that is crawling around the edge of the object – their pencil will record every bump and every dip in the surface that ladybug is crawling over.
2. Do a sketch of just the shapes of the objects. Have students reduce each object to a simple shape, and focus now on the composition of the objects, and how they are overlapping.

For the final drawing, remind students that the important thing is to practice looking, it is not important how realistic their final drawings look. All artists give their interpretation of a subject, and there is no right or wrong in creating art.

Link to images of Still Life art works :

<http://www.theartwolf.com/articles/best-still-life-paintings.htm>

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/explore-the-collection/works-of-art/still-lives>

<http://www.saatchiart.com/art-collection/Painting-Photography-Assemblage-Collage/Still-Life/2/34708/view>

Blind Contour Drawing Lesson Demo: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKHVqbM_xLU

After Your Visit

Activity: Make your own scanner prints

Materials:

- Flatbed scanner
- Computer
- Computer monitor
- Glass cleaner
- Inkjet printer
- Sheet of clear acetate
- Materials to scan: flowers, leaves, toys, feathers, cut out shapes, popsicle sticks, yarn, plastic wrap, cotton balls, etc.

Steps:

1. Remove the scanner lid, or prop it open so it will stay open.
2. Clean the scanner glass thoroughly.
3. Cover the scanner glass with the sheet of clear acetate and tape in place to protect the glass from scratches.
4. Connect the scanner to the computer and monitor.
5. Place objects, such as flowers, face down on the scanner.
6. Remind students NOT to look straight at the scanner light.
7. Do a preview scan and reposition objects if necessary.
8. Turn out the lights
9. Scan!
10. Print finished scans on photo paper and create a class exhibition.

Some ideas:

- Do an arrangement of leaves, flowers, and fruit based on the season of the year.
- Create a picture using everyday objects or cut out shapes – students can arrange their objects on a sheet of clear acetate and bring it up to the scanner when they are ready. Some ideas: a face, a robot, a landscape, a pattern, a skyscraper, a rocket ship, a dinosaur skeleton, an insect.
- Wrap the scanner carefully in heavy duty plastic wrap, then experiment with liquids or paint on acetate sheets or in a glass bottomed dish. Students can try finger painting, drip liquids of different viscosities, or try experimenting with oil, water, or soap.

Want more information or some cool ideas? Check out these videos:

How to scan flowers and leaves: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzSszdj7Zq4>

Scanner Art Class – Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cccUzdi2nxl>

Scanner Art Class – Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5SSxECBiPO>

VOCABULARY

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.
Drawing	Artwork that is created using lines and marks from materials such as pencils, ink pens, charcoal, chalks, and pastels.
Portrait	A genre of art featuring a person, several people, or perhaps an animal. Portraits are usually facial, but they can also show full figures.
Scanner	A scanner is a computer input device that scans documents such as photographs and pages of text. When a document is scanned, it is converted into a digital format. This creates an electronic version of the document that can be viewed and edited on a computer.
Shading	Showing change from light to dark or dark to light in a picture by darkening areas that would be shadowed and leaving other areas light. Shading is often used to produce illusions of dimension and depth.
Still Life	A picture that consists of an arrangement of inanimate objects. This genre of artwork flourished among the 17 th Century Dutch painters, and typically consists of arrangements of everyday objects, such as flowers, fruits, vegetables, tableware, and pottery vessels.
Subject	What is shown in an artwork, or what an artwork is “about”.
Tone or Value	The element of lightness and darkness in an artwork. Light and dark areas generally create the illusion of form or 3-dimensionality.
Video Art	An art form that emerged in the 1960's, when artists began to explore the possibilities of video as an art medium. Video art differs from film or videos seen on television, as there does not necessarily need to be a narrative or definitive beginning, middle and end. Often video artists experiment with sound, video imagery, and how the work is viewed (i.e. projected or on different screens).

Upcoming Events

Exhibition Opening

Saturday, Saturday, April 26 from 2:00-4:00pm

Come join us celebrate the opening of the exhibition at a reception in the gallery. Artist Evan Lee will be giving a tour of his work at 2:30pm.

Panel Discussion: A Conversation About Collecting Contemporary Art

Saturday, May 3, 2:00 – 3:30pm

Co-sponsored by the Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver

Hear different perspectives on collecting contemporary art from Wil Aballe, Dealer and Owner of Wil Aballe Art Projects, Kate Bellringer, Director of Contemporary & Canadian Art Auctions at Maynards Fine Art & Antiques, and Donna Partridge, private collector and Manager of Art Rental & Sales at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Illustrated Talk: Vancouver's Historic Chinatown by Hayne Wai

Saturday, May 10, 2:00pm -3:00pm

In partnership with the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC

Hayne Wai will present an illustrated talk on the history of Chinese Canadians in BC with a focus on Vancouver's Chinatown, which dates back to the origins of the city in the 1880's. Discussion will also include how the growth of Richmond's Chinese Canadian community has impacted historic Chinatown and the current issues Chinatown faces today.

Art + Tea + Talk

Wednesday, May 14, 10:30-11:30 am

Conversation about Evan Lee's current exhibition led by Gallery Director Rachel Rosenfield Lafo. Rachel will lead a short tour, followed by an open discussion of the issues and ideas behind the works over tea and baked goods. Free admission, everyone welcome to attend.

Gallery Fundraiser: Spring into Art

Saturday, May 24, 6:00pm - 9:00pm

This catered ticketed event will be a festive party featuring a silent auction and live entertainment.

Artist Talk: Evan Lee

Saturday, May 31, 2:00pm - 3:00pm

Exhibiting artist Evan Lee will present an illustrated talk on his working process and discuss the works in his current exhibition, *Elders and Roots*.

Doors Open 2014

Weekend of June 7 & 8

Free gallery tours in Mandarin and English from 1pm-3pm

Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program

7700 Minoru Gate, Richmond, BC, V6Y 1R9 Phone: 604-247-8300 Fax: 604-247-8301

www.richmondartgallery.org

Gallery Programs

Family Sunday

Drop-in 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Free

Families are invited to participate in various exhibition-related art projects and activities on the fourth Sunday of each month. Stories, music, art...activities vary from month to month! It's free, thanks to the RBC Foundation.

2014 Schedule: April 27 • May 25 • June 22 • July 27 • Aug 24 • Sept 28 • Oct 26 • Nov 23

Drop-in Drawing for Adults

Drop-in 6:00 – 9:00 pm, Free

Drop-in the Art Gallery and draw inspiration from original works of art! Drop-in Drawing for Adults is a program designed to bring out the social side of sketching. Some instruction provided, and you draw, collage, and create whatever you like. Materials provided, but you are welcome to bring your own sketchbooks. No previous drawing experience required! For ages 16+

2014 Schedule: April 3 • May 1 • June 5 • July 3 • Aug 7 • Oct 2 • Dec 4

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