FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Cheers to Muses: Contemporary Works by Asian American Women

Asian American Women Artists Association
978-0-9787359-0-6
(December 31, 2006)

As a part of their mission to bring visibility to the works of Asian American women, the Asian American Women Artists Association offers a pan-Asian anthology which honors its forebears while reaching out to the next generation.

A companion piece to a juried exhibition which took place June through August of 2007 in San Francisco, the collection gathers works from sixty-four artists with roots in more than thirty-five countries, including India, Pakistan, Singapore, and Vietnam. The visual arts represented include sculpture, painting, and installation pieces, and are evenly interspersed between poems, essays, and short stories.

In addition, each artist offers a brief homage to her muse or muses, other Asian American women who have provided inspiration and encouragement. Fifty-five muses are named with métiers ranging from architects and writers, to actresses and political activists. The most mentioned muse is Maya Lin, the architect who designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at twenty-one. Often the muses are credited with creating a sense that the artist's voice and identity as an Asian American woman is valid. Of her professor, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Anh-Hoa Thi Nguyen recalls the revelatory moment when her teacher first pronounced her name in class: "She pronounced my name as a song, in proper sequence […] I barely recognized the tones and rhythms, the poetry that belongs to me."

The pieces grapple with motifs such as multiple identity, exclusion, and integration. In May Chan's sculpture, "Home-Land," a pair of sandals made of dark hair and red thread bear the map of the United States on the left shoe and Hong Kong on the right. A little boy with an on/off switch in his back which is "like another ear or nose, but […] deeper, like a plant root," in Vanessa Merina's engaging short story embodies *otherness* and how it can create cruelty and fascination. The desire to serve as inspiration for future generations is highlighted in the lines of the final piece, "The Call," by Clara Hsu. "Come, sisters, / strike your drums, / over waves we glide. […] At midnight we spill / star dust, stir dreams." Though most of the pieces have an overt political element, some are pure sensory experiences, such as Suzanne Kimiko Onodera's atmospheric painting, "In the Carmine Dream II," in which a hazy nimbus of reds float on the

canvas.

Cheers provides a satisfying sampler of works by contemporary Asian American women artists, especially those of northern California. It is engaging and attractive, perfect in format and scope for the coffee table and casual perusal. In concert, the pieces of this anthology testify to the truth of personal, artistic, cultural experience. Driven by the inspiration of a muse, they further widen the doorway of what is possible.

Naomi Millán