

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS:
Angela Tung (angela@pearlriver.com)
Joanne Kwong (joanne@pearlriver.com)
212.431.4770

**PEARL RIVER MART GALLERY AND THINK!CHINATOWN PRESENT
'HEARTMIND: PORTRAITS FROM THE BOB ENG LEE AND
ASIAN AMERICAN ARTS CENTRE COLLECTIONS'**

Art exhibition highlights works from the permanent collection of a seminal AAPI community organization and the personal collection of its longtime founding executive director

NEW YORK, NY – Oct. 20, 2021 – Established in 1974, the [Asian American Arts Centre](#) (AAAC) is one of the earliest Asian American community arts organizations in the country. Choreographer Eleanor Yung (an original member of the pioneering collective Basement Workshop) co-founded AAAC as the Asian American Dance Theatre (AADT) with her partner Bob Lee, who would become the eventual executive director.

The AADT offered dance lessons and some of the earliest Asian American contemporary dance performances. Initially operating out of the New York Public Library, they soon established their own facility in Manhattan Chinatown, and eventually grew to include a visual arts program. In 1987, the dance theatre and visual arts program evolved into the AAAC. Through these changes and evolutions, the mission always remained the same: to promote and support Asian American art and artists.

All the while Lee was collecting artwork — sculptures, drawings, and paintings spanning nearly 40 years of exhibitions and programming. Today, the collection totals about 300 contemporary Asian American art works and about 200 Chinese folk art pieces. This exhibition — co-curated by Lisa Yin Zhang, Simon Wu, and Jayne Cole and part of Think!Chinatown's Chinatown Arts Week — highlights just some of this vast collection, sweeping through the history of the storied organization with select works from 18 Asian American artists.

"Bob and the AAAC are both such important parts of Asian American art, history, and activism in Chinatown," said Joanne Kwong, president of Pearl River Mart. "Pearl River, which opened just a few years before AAAC, is also part of that history, and to come full circle and be able to host these precious works from such a significant and heretofore unseen collection is a real honor. Not to mention we love to work with our friends at Think!Chinatown, and are so happy to partner with them on this and be part of Chinatown Arts Week."

"We're having a real renaissance exploration of Asian American identity right now," said Yin Kong, director/co-founder of Think!Chinatown. "As an inter-generational non-profit, we felt it was especially important to shine a light on the pioneering works of the generation of Asian American artists and



activists before us. Understanding our own history is empowering, and lets the younger generation build with real meaning and intention."

The title HEARTMIND is inspired by conversations between the curators, presenters, and Lee, specifically about Sung Ho Choi's collage of a Chinese character, which engages what Lee calls the "heartmind" of Asian Americans. The work depicts the character 心, which in simplest terms translates into English as "heart," but in Chinese means much more — feeling, thinking, center, core — and often all at once. So too is "Asian American art": on the surface a simple term but upon closer look, varied and complex, with multiple facets and phases, many things at once, and ever evolving.

Through intergenerational perspectives, the AAAC collection has evolved as well. Lee says, "To have hundreds of paintings, drawings, and sculptures of the permanent collection be made accessible to young curators, enabling them to choose which artworks they find meaningful, is a special moment. Works that didn't seem to have significance suddenly do through their eyes."

HEARTMIND adopts a broad understanding of portraiture, displaying significant people, places, and ideas within the two collections. Portraits include Tseng Kwong Chi's self-portrait, Corky Lee's photograph of a pair of white police officers during a Chinatown celebration, and Basement Workshop director Fay Chiang's portrait of her father. Also on view is the first work Lee ever added to AAAC's permanent collection, a drawing by Carrie Yamaoka, as well as a drawing by Lee himself, as a personified vision of the AAAC collection.

At One Pike, on the other side of Chinatown, is [a companion exhibition](#) that further engages the history of AAAC and the New York City Asian American arts community. Together, these two exhibitions represent only the first of a long-running intergenerational engagement with a vast, enlightening, and idiosyncratic collection.

HEARTMIND at Pearl River is on view through Jan. 9, 2022. The opening reception is Wednesday, Oct. 20, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the Pearl River Mart Gallery at 452 Broadway (between Howard and Grand). The event is free but [registration is required](#).

Pearl River Mart's art gallery features curated exhibitions with local artists from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. Previous artists include *New Yorker* magazine cartoonists Amy Hwang, Jeremy Nguyen, Suerynn Lee, Evan Hahn, and more; photographers Louis Chan, Hiroyuki Ito, and Corky Lee; painters Arlan Huang and Kam Mak; illustrators Jerry Ma, Yumi Sakugawa and Felicia Liang; and multimedia artists Wiena Lin, Ben Sloat, and Xin Song. Its most recent show, and the inaugural exhibition of their new SoHo space, was "Corky Lee on My Mind: A Photographic Tribute," dedicated to the legendary photographer and activist Corky Lee (1947–2021).

Press contacts:

- Angela Tung (angela@pearlriver.com)
- Joanne Kwong (joanne@pearlriver.com)
- 212.431.4770



About the Curators

Lisa Yin Zhang is an art historian, curator, and writer from Queens, New York. A graduate of Williams College and Stuyvesant High School, she is currently senior staff writer at TheGuide.art, and has previously held positions at the Museum of Chinese in America, the Noguchi Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, and more.

Simon Wu is a writer and curator based in Brooklyn. He serves as the Program Coordinator for the Racial Imaginary Institute and is an alum of the Whitney Independent Study Program.

Jayne Cole is a contemporary art historian based in New York City. Her research focuses on the intersections of art, architecture, and urbanism in Lower Manhattan in the late twentieth century.

About Bob Lee

Bob Lee is the longtime executive director and co-founder of the Asian American Arts Centre. Born in Newark, New Jersey, Lee moved to New York City in 1970, where he studied art history at the City College of New York and became involved in Asian American community organizations including Basement Workshop, where he and Eleanor Yung met. He was a founding board member of the [Asian American Arts Alliance](#) and is currently a board member of Think!Chinatown.

About Think!Chinatown

Think!Chinatown is an intergenerational nonprofit that supports Manhattan's Chinatown through art, storytelling, and neighborhood engagement. Chinatown Arts Week is their annual cultural festival of art, food, performances, and installations to connect the grassroots arts of Chinatown with emerging API artists and a wider audience. Visit www.thinkchinatown.org and follow on Instagram at [@thinkchinatown](#).

About Pearl River Mart

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Pearl River Mart was founded as a "friendship store" in 1971. The iconic Asian emporium has locations in New York City's SoHo district, the esteemed Museum of Chinese in America, and the popular Chelsea Market with both a retail outlet and Pearl River Mart Foods. From home furnishings to fashion to snacks and everything in between, the store features one-of-a-kind items imported from Asia, as well as innovative merchandise designed and created by Asian Americans. A beloved destination for people from all over the globe, Pearl River has become symbolic of the uniqueness, authenticity, and multiculturalism of New York City. Visit www.PearlRiver.com and follow on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#).

©2021 Pearl River Mart

