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**PEARL RIVER MART GALLERY AND THINK!CHINATOWN PRESENT  
'JUST BETWEEN US: FROM THE ARCHIVES OF ARLAN HUANG'**

*An art collection spanning 40 years of Asian American activism  
in New York's Chinatown, the downtown art scene, and beyond*



*Untitled, 1987. Photograph by Corky Lee.*

New York, NY — April 10, 2023 — For nearly six decades as a practicing artist, Arlan Huang has quietly collected art. While some of the pieces were purchased, much has been amassed through “art swaps,” friendly exchanges between fellow artists. “Just Between Us,” a group exhibition presented in partnership by Think!Chinatown and Pearl River Mart, highlights some of these works.

In 1974, Huang with business partner Karl Matsuda opened their shop, Squid Frames. However, it was never just a framing business. A room in the shop acted as Huang’s studio, and it was there that artists would stop to chat, share advice, or keep each other company. It was also there that Arlan had serendipitous encounters with artists which often resulted in lasting relationships and the exchange of art.

Rather than illustrate his tastes, Huang’s archive memorializes a people. The central narrative isn’t market speculation but those serendipitous meetings with artists. For him, archiving has been equal parts a lifelong research project, an enchantment, and a collaboration.

Like a confidence between friends, intel given off the record, or a shared history or experience, this exhibition is “just between us.” The phrase evokes the major principles that form the bedrock of Huang’s collecting ethics: that art should circulate outside the nefarious concerns of the market, that it should not seek approval from heteropatriarchal white institutions, and that a secret language in the form of gossip and complaint forges the most precious and intimate of friendships.

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Describing his archive, Huang said, “These are the relationships that have shaped my art and allowed me to express my voice. These are the artists I’ve bonded with through time and shared battles in search of Asian American eyes. And it is important that we all witness this gathering. It is evidence of ‘we.’”

“‘Just Between Us’ weaves together art, conversation, mutual support and love that are the foundations of our neighborhood and community,” said Amy Chin, president of the board of Think!Chinatown. “It reaches across generations and offers a view of how an often elitist ‘art industry’ can live in and serve real local communities. Think!Chinatown is so pleased to partner with two of our favorite local heroes (Arlan and Pearl River Mart) to showcase this work.”

The works on view narrate both historic and deeply personal moments. As a longtime Chinatown resident, Huang collected photos by the celebrated photographer **Corky Lee**. As a member of the Asian American arts network, **Godzilla**, and the Chinatown-based collective **Basement Workshop**, Huang traded work with artists like **Ken Chu**, **Tomie Arai**, **Hoyt Soohoo**, and **Bob Hsiang**. As the owner of the frame shop Squid Frames, Huang kept longtime correspondence with conceptual artist **Sol Lewitt**.

An abundance of Asian Americans in the collection, such as **Martin Wong** and **Alex Paik**, often prompts Huang to consider it an “Asian American art collection.” Presented for the first time in this scale, the collection asks what Asian American art is and could be, and why Asian American identity and life continue to matter.

When considering exhibition spaces to show his archive, Huang only ever considered Pearl River Mart. “Pearl River is a family business that has kept the original mom and pop work ethic,” Huang said. “Like the neighborhood store it welcomes you like family. The gallery they carved out is a gift for us. And gifts are reciprocal. It’s the only place I want to show. It is by us for us.”

“Arlan Huang is a magical thinker who has never forgotten his roots,” said Joanne Kwong, president of Pearl River Mart. “His talent has taken him to the highest echelons of the art world but his true gift is creating family and community wherever he goes. At a time when the world could not be more divided, he’s chosen to open up his beautiful personal collection and focus on what brings us all together. It’s exactly what the city — and our community — needs at this moment in time.”

[A catalog](#) published by Pearl River Mart and Think!Chinatown with an essay by Danielle Wu and an interview between Howie Chen and Arlan Huang will accompany the exhibition. The exhibition is made possible thanks to support of the State of New York and New York State Council on the Arts. It is also supported, in part, by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

From May 1 through May 31, photographs from “Just Between Us” can also be seen on outdoor tables throughout the Meatpacking District. Featured are Fay Chiang, the longtime executive director of Basement Workshop, an early NYC-based Asian American arts organization; members of the Asian Coalition Against the Vietnam War in an anti-war march; Huang’s Squid Frames partner, Karl Matsuda; and more.

“Just Between Us” is on view in the Pearl River Mart Gallery from May 4 through Sept. 10, 2023. Free and open to the public during business hours.

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### About the Artist

**Arlan Huang** is an artist based in New York. His work is characterized by its play with translucency and opacity, darting between a wide variety of mediums including acrylic paint, glass, and multimedia installations. His abstractions are informed by the conflation of recent and collective memory, as well as everyday life; for example, his freehanded paintings reference his mother's cheongsams and grapes harvested at only certain times a year in Japan. Taken together, his work probes the possibility of Asian Americanness, or the feeling of belonging amidst feelings of placelessness. As an active member in Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network, Huang has been a key player in broadening opportunities for Asian Americans in the Arts and Asian American activism more broadly. His murals have dotted various public spaces in New York, and he has placed permanent installations in New York and San Francisco.

### About the Curators

**Howie Chen** is the Curator of 80 Washington Square East Gallery at NYU. A founding director of Chen's, a townhouse gallery in Brooklyn, and Dispatch, he has held curatorial roles at the Whitney Museum of American Art and MoMA PS1. His writings have been published by Primary Information and Badlands Unlimited and have appeared in magazines such as Artforum, Frieze, and Art in America. Chen is the editor of the anthology *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network 1990-2001* (Primary Information, 2021), a comprehensive collection of writings, art projects, publications, correspondence, organizational documents, and other archival ephemera from the trailblazing Asian American artist collective that sought to stimulate social change through art and advocacy.

**Danielle Wu** is a writer and curator based in Brooklyn, New York. She is currently Communications & Database Manager at Asian American Arts Alliance (A4) and was previously a Digital Fellow at *Democracy Now!* Her reviews have been published in *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Frieze Magazine*, and *The Offing*. Notable curatorial projects include *Ghost in the Ghost* at Tiger Strikes Asteroid, New York, with scholar Anne Anlin Cheng (2019) and *Water Works* at International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York (2022).

### About Think!Chinatown

**Think!Chinatown** is a place-based intergenerational non-profit in Manhattan's Chinatown, working at the intersection of storytelling, arts and neighborhood engagement. We believe the process of listening, reflecting and celebrating develops the community cohesion and trust necessary to work on larger neighborhood issues. By building strength from within our neighborhood, we can shape better policies and programs that define our public spaces, celebrate our cultural heritage and innovate how our collective memories are represented. Visit [www.thinkchinatown.org](http://www.thinkchinatown.org) and follow on Instagram at [@thinkchinatown](https://www.instagram.com/thinkchinatown).

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Celebrating its 52nd anniversary, **Pearl River Mart** was founded as a “friendship store” in 1971. The iconic Asian emporium has locations in New York City’s SoHo district 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](http://www.PearlRiver.com) and follow on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#).

### **About the Pearl River Mart Gallery**

The Pearl River Mart gallery features curated exhibitions with local artists from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. Previous artists include: sculptor Warren King; *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 Sammy Yuen, Nancy Pappas, Jerry Ma, Yumi Sakugawa, and Felicia Liang; and multimedia artists Wiena Lin, Ben Sloat, and Xin Song.

Recent exhibitions include “Our Roots Run Deep: Finding Home in Chinatown” by Warren King; “Drawn Together: Stories of Resilience and Renewal in NYC CHinatown” by Sammy Yuen; “Soft Solidarity (SoS): Uniting to Protect, Empower, and Heal,” a group show of AAPI women artists; “Heartmind: Portraits from the Bob Eng Lee and Asian American Arts Centre Collections,” presented in collaboration with nonprofit arts organization Think!Chinatown; “Corky Lee on My Mind: A Photographic Tribute,” dedicated to the legendary photographer and activist Corky Lee (1947–2021).