

# Local artist explores changing landscapes of existence

By Maileen Hamto  
The Asian Reporter

The culmination of various phases in a person's life represents a deviation or "exit" from the norm. Yet life's exits do not necessarily represent an end, or death. Through oil paintings exhibited at several venues in Portland, artist Ping Khaw challenges the notion of the finality of exits, arguing that terminations almost always lead to other forms of existence.

"When you move from one stage of life to another, you still exist, but in a different way. The process is neverending, because we're always changing," says Khaw, who recently introduced Portlanders to her latest series, "Of Exist and Exits."

While her previous works have focused on social issues, Khaw turns the scrutiny inward to create a body of work that depicts the varying moods, hues, distortions, and explosions involved in every transcendental and transformational life experience. Her latest body of work serves as a metaphor for how our roles, expectations, and purpose for being evolve over time, helping shape our different incarnations.

Khaw draws on the inspiration of her own experience of personal and professional transformation, noting that her evolution as an artist wasn't without its challenges.

As a young girl growing up in Malaysia, Khaw started drawing when she was six years old. Watercolor soon became her medium of choice, and she began competing at national art contests at age nine. By the time she was 11, she began competing internationally with young artists from India, Taiwan, and other countries.

In time, Khaw began to seek more than the accolades that came with creating "pretty pictures suitable for hanging on



**EXPLORING EXISTENCE.** In her recent series entitled "Of Exist and Exits," artist Ping Khaw challenges the notion of the finality of exits, arguing that terminations almost always lead to other forms of existence. Meet Ping Khaw at an artist's reception scheduled from 5:00 to 8:00pm on Thursday, November 9 at Sylvie Day Spa and Salon, 1706 N.W. Glisan Street, Portland. (AR Photos/Maileen Hamto)

walls," she says.

"I started getting tired of pretty paintings. I wanted to create works that explored meaning and substance. I wanted to be in a place where I can have the freedom to challenge perception."

To expand her prospects as an artist, Khaw decided to continue her studies at the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA). She was drawn to PNCA because of its ties to the Portland Art Museum. "I loved the idea that they allowed students to experiment," she says. After receiving her bachelor's degree in fine arts, Khaw focused on art education. A prolific artist, Khaw has created watercolors, mixed media works, and murals, and exhibited her works at various juried shows over the years.

Her latest series also celebrates her decision to plunge headlong into becoming a full-time artist. "This is what I've always wanted to do," she says.

Developing the concept for her latest work took some serious soul searching for

Khaw.

"All this time, I felt like I've been wary of people typecasting me as an Asian artist, doing Asian art. But then I realized that I was simply avoiding something for the sake of avoiding it. I wasn't being true to myself," she says.

Khaw uses the recurring imagery of the lotus flower in the series to reflect on the contrasts that create varying textures of the human experience. "It's always been amazing to me to see ... the lotus — one of the purest, most beautiful flowers — blooming in some of the dirtiest places you can find. To me, it's an excellent example of the process of life. How we 'grow up' relies on how we purify ourselves by filtering elements of our environment."

Khaw also uses the symbolism of the lotus to illustrate how the variety of experience brings about a different incarnation at each stage of a person's life. She says that a flower may grow in the same spot every year, but it's never the same. "They're very much like people.

We're constantly growing, always changing," she says.

The work also touches on her experience as an immigrant, straddling two different planes of existence. "As an immigrant, you carry with you a lot of memory from the past, even though you choose to live here. At the same time, when you go back to your home country, you find that it's not the same."

Meet Ping Khaw at an artist's reception scheduled from 5:00 to 8:00pm on Thursday, November 9 at Sylvie Day Spa and Salon, 1706 N.W. Glisan Street, Portland. Through December 31, installations of "Of Exist and Exits" are on display at Kinta Restaurant, located at S.E. 35th Avenue and S.E. Belmont Street, Portland; Gallery de Haas at TanRio Brewery Blocks, N.W. 13th Avenue and West Burnside in the Pearl; and at Sylvie Day Spa and Salon.

For more information, visit <www.pingkhaw.com> or e-mail the artist at <pingkhaw@comcast.net>.

## IRCO poster contest winners honored

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization's (IRCO) Asian Family Center (AFC) has announced the winners of its poster contest to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in the Asian/Pacific Islander (API) community.

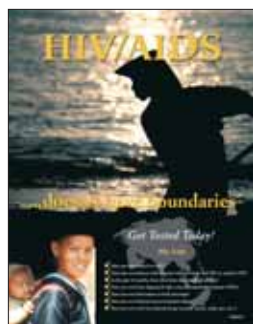
The \$300 first-place winner is Tom Bush of Springfield, Oregon, for his poster "Asian Woman." Lannie Appel of Beaverton took second place with his poster, "Fear," and Esther Poleo of Beaverton took third place with "Women Learning HIV/AIDS." The prizes for second and third place were \$200 and \$100, respectively.

The contest was funded through a grant from the Department of Health and

Human Services for the purpose of raising awareness, educating, and increasing prevention through education messages aimed at API women.

Entries were judged on artistic quality, appeal to the API community, and how well they raise awareness about HIV. The judges were local artist Ping Khaw, Selby Stebbins of the Cascade AIDS Project, Carol Casciato of the Multnomah County Health Department's HIV/AIDS Awareness Program, and representatives from the IRCO Asian Family Center.

The winners were honored in a ceremony at IRCO on October 30. To learn more about AFC, visit <www.ircog.org>.



**WINNING POSTERS.** The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization's Asian Family Center announced the winners of its poster contest to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in the Asian/Pacific Islander community. First place went to Tom Bush for his poster "Asian Woman" (left). Lannie Appel's "Fear" (middle) won second place and Esther Poleo's "Women Learning HIV/AIDS" was awarded third.

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