

Entering a New Dimension.

Judith van Praag

Imagine, you've gone to Jack Straw Productions on Roosevelt Avenue in Seattle's university district to check out "YÍJÚ: Songs of Dislocation", composer Byron Au Yong's latest multi media installation. You ring the bell at the front door and are buzzed in. In the white washed lobby someone points you in the direction of their new media gallery. The text on the wall welcomes you to "a handmade, technological garden."

You read that Byron's grandparents fled China for the Philippines in 1938, leaving their daughter to fend for herself, shoeless, burning peanut shells to keep warm. You read that their son, Byron's father, was born in the Philippines in 1941. He left for the United States in the late 1960s, had a Chinese passport but never set foot in China. You learn that Byron Au Yong composes music "from the absence of longing."

You know that Byron Au Yong is the composer of acoustic music. His current projects include "AXIS: From Silk Road to Terror", "CELL: An Electronic Age Vaudeville", and "SURRENDER: A Tai Qi Cantata" to be premiered by The Esoterics in 2005. And you know that he is dedicated to collaboration.

You're curious to see what landscape architect Lorraine Pai has built, where Yoko Murao's calligraphy comes in, how video footage by award winning filmmaker Chishan Lin and International Examiner's Community Voice Award winner John D. Pai will connect real and imagined memories, and what John D. Pai's media installation entails.

Leaving the street noise behind, you open the door to the new media gallery, to enter a surprising landscape of sound, light and darkness. You're in a different world, "one between dream and death." In this darkness filmed images are projected onto objects –light sculptures– built out of wire mesh. Scenes from Byron Au Yong's grandparents' 70th anniversary celebration, of Chishan Lin's father, of voyages and children at play, become colorful repetitions. Second and third generations of imagination, materialization of the (im)migration theme.

You meander, looking up and around at the colorful changes, you follow the path, directed by the position of floating objects, their smooth black shadows on the floor; obsidian stones, or mirrors, ponds of reflection.

Calligraphy travels across surfaces, making you want to lie down and follow the dream. Small round pillows of woven sea grass beckon you to sit – under, beside, opposite the three dimensional projection screens.

You give yourself time to adjust, you give the installation time to take you in, to make you part of it all. In the black box which the new media gallery has become, you find yourself at the bottom of the ocean, watching a toothless mouth shape incomprehensible words. You listen to voices chant, sigh and sing. You listen to traditional drums, wordless lullabies, moans.

You face a curtain of softly floating impressions of leaves; silken squares strung on vines. Lit from above, and repeated in shadows on the wall they make for an underwater forest. You rise from the sea grass pillow and move about, among the constantly changing colors. Surround sound and darkness envelops you. There's whispering, a soft murmur, the filling in of sounds, until the crescendo and a moment of silence followed by cymbals, string instruments voice another crescendo and again silence. On going repetition and yet each time something totally different. Small sounds of paper being crushed, a capella voices and sighs, followed by orchestrated percussion instruments.

After wandering around and around for what could be half a mile, or reclining, after having become part of the installation, you're mesmerized by the "real life" you recognize in the work on video and the projected "ghosts", fainter and fainter after each repetition. Until ultimately there's no memory, only a longing to see and hear what's really there.

You imagine all that, you might as well go and see and listen for yourself.

Music was performed in collaboration with Karen Akada, Marc Collins, Mard dela Cruz, Jessika Kenney, Gina Sala, Aiko Shimada

and James Whetzel. Lyrics by Aaron Jafferis and Frederick Sauter. Recorded by Steve Ditore.

Until December 31, 2004. At the Jack Straw New Media Gallery, 4261 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle. Hours: Mon.-Fri. 9 A.M.-6 P.M. All programs are free

Previously published on 12/15/2004 in the International Examiner.

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