

MEETING POINT TWENTY YEARS

# FULL CIRCLE



# INTRODUCTION

## TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

by Nancy Townshend

Beneath the frenetic pace of Calgary – whose major projects reached a record \$32.8 billion during this boom from June 2007 to May 2008 – is a dedicated group of artists from around the world who are celebrating twenty years of connecting, exhibiting and making art in Calgary with purpose.

The art by artists in this group, Meeting Point Artists Association, share attributes with art arising from Oriental and Western civilizations that have evolved over centuries from deeply held artistic traditions to freedom of expression and innovation. For instance, artists of the Southern Sung Dynasty in China such as Mu Chi' (active 1269 AD) achieved quietude and restraint, as earlier abbreviated techniques, the gradual dissolution of pictorial form, Taoism and Zen (Ch'an) Buddhism with their intuitive responses to man and nature merged for the very first time.<sup>i</sup> In Western Europe during the 1880s, Post – Impressionists reacted to the formlessness of Impressionism and their reliance on external objects as subject matter in their paintings. Gauguin and Van Gogh, both Synthetists, created more subjective art conveying their ideas and emotions.

Meeting Point Artists of Calgary, however, uniquely embrace EAST/WEST meeting points as profound motivation and sources for creativity in their new art. Call it immediate cultural synapses, A Silk Road: Destination Calgary, and hard fought freedom. Why and how did this happen?

In 1988, the year Calgary hosted the Winter Olympics, Simon (Yat Sing) Wong of Calgary offered his patrons "Dinner

with the Artist" at his Chinese Express Restaurant the first Monday each month. These artists included Wang Kui from Sichuan, Prof Chen Jinzhang from Guang Dong, China, David (Youn -Dak) Noh from South Korea, Kunio Isa from Japan, Helena Hadala, a Western artist who had recently returned from Japan after spending two years studying art there, and others. Hadala gave a Japanese style woodblock demonstration following dinner with her in 1988. A common bond was felt among the artists with EAST/WEST sensitivities. Simon Wong decided to formalize the relationship along with other founding members of the Meeting Point Artists Association, Helena Hadala, Lap Lam,<sup>ii</sup> Josette Khu, Lee Byng and Catherine Huang-Tam, Henry Way and Randy Yan. For Wong, besides the official mandate of the Society, one goal of Meeting Point Artists Association was "to create character of humanity."<sup>iii</sup>

The possibilities for EAST/WEST meeting points seem endless. Knowledge about traditional and new art materials and techniques, ideas and information are shared amongst members on a regular basis. Philosophies developed.

For Helena Hadala (MFA, U of C, 2002), "it has been a wonderful experience for me as an artist to be involved with like minded artists who have bridged both cultures, Oriental and Occidental with their philosophical and aesthetic concerns. For me it has been a 'Meeting Point' or confluence of traditional and contemporary concerns in the art making process. I have tried to assimilate my Eastern European heritage with my love of Oriental philosophy (particularly Zen Buddhism) where the work is a poetic

visual image, a type of inner-scape reflecting rather than describing my perceptual world."<sup>iv</sup>

For Simon Wong who was born in Guandong (Canton) China and learned Chinese painting and calligraphy in Hong Kong as a teenager and was ACAD trained, "the West is 'Yang' and East in 'Yin' in the presentation of each viewing point. In Western art, you will find strong subjects, with lighting and colour, but Eastern art is 'Yin' which tends to [give] thoughts in places you don't see. You have to find or meditate about it. That is why East and West should meet and balance each other."<sup>v</sup>

For Isabelle Hunt – Johnson (MFA, U of A, 1982), her "watercolour works evoke the celebration of the life force, life cycles and excitement of movement and gesture. Layering and Duality reinforces the passage of time and the interaction of the dance. My work celebrates the life energy, the eastern affinity with nature and the ephemeral quality of the moment."<sup>vi</sup>

Lap Lam's focus is "to express the three pillars of Chinese philosophies of Confucian, Taoism and Buddhism through the modern abstract expressionist format."<sup>vii</sup>

The possibilities for EAST/WEST meeting points for the Association increased with the influx of new members, from eight in 1988 to over thirty members in 2008. Morley Hollenberg (D. Phil, Pharmacology, Oxford University, 1967) joined and was tutored like Myken Woods, and Josette Khu by the master Chinese calligrapher Chin Shek Lam (Lin Chien – Shih) and "his brother"<sup>viii</sup>

Jack Wise. In 1991 Calgary-born and raised Harry Kiyooka, art professor at U of C, Myken Woods and Kathleen Bentley joined the Meeting Point Artists Association. Setsuko Onishi Moulton was born and raised in Japan and immigrated to Canada in 1983. Paresh Athparia is a self-taught artist from India who arrived in Calgary in 1981 and has exhibited in Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, India and Hong Kong. Athparia is also an author and poet. Chu Hon Sun studied Chinese and modern art at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1971 – 1975) followed by studying sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Carrarra, Italy (1976 – 1980). Hon Sun brought marble from Carrarra to Hong Kong, then to Canada and Calgary. Hon Sun has worked on public sculpture commissions world-wide including the Yat Tung Estate in Hong Kong. Amy Loewan (MFA, U of A, 1995) was born in Hong Kong and joined the Association in 1999. Truly a global migration of individual artists to Calgary!

But what of the power of a group, the Meeting Point Artists Association, deeply committed to creating art whose sources of inspiration lie at the junctures of oriental and occidental traditional and contemporary artistic practices? In, what is for many, their new city, Calgary? What have been the results of what became an open, cooperative group process over these past twenty years?

Since 1988 the Meeting Point Artists Association have exhibited their art locally and internationally. Following shows at the Chinese Express Restaurant in 1988, the Association exhibited at the Chinese Cultural Centre in 1989, the City of Calgary City Hall in 1991, the Calgary-Hong Kong Visual Arts Exchange organized by Lap Lam and Hon Sun and traveling to the University of Hong Kong Gallery in 1991, Confluence at the Nova Gallery in the 1990s, East and

West – Across The Rockies at the Chinese Cultural Centre Museum in Vancouver in 1997, the Tenth Anniversary Show at the Triangle Gallery in Calgary, the major art exhibition titled Art Bridge which opened in Calgary at the Garrison Gallery in 2002 and with financial assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts traveled to the Hong Kong Central Library and to China, shows at the Myken Woods Gallery in Calgary and now this Twentieth Anniversary Show.

Another fruit of their labour was offering workshops, by a Chinese artist from Beijing and a Japanese artist from Tokyo in Calgary in 1997, for instance. And the interchange continues. Caucasian artist Myken Woods from Calgary gave workshops in Chinese calligraphy to Canadian students of Chinese ancestry at Series in Red Deer, Alberta.

Clearly the Meeting Point Artists Association is fulfilling its potential significantly near and far.

This Twentieth Anniversary Show of the Meeting Point Artists Association during Art Walk '08, the year Beijing hosted the Summer Olympics, resonates with meaningful EAST/WEST art that reflects both tradition and transformation. To elaborate only about the latter, in Peace Project (2008) Amy Loewan interweaves in numerous international languages words to achieve peace: forgiveness, compassion, understanding, gentleness, tolerance and respect. An abiding centering circle signifies the planet Earth perfectly balanced within a Heavenly square format. A related Peace Project was exhibited in Human/Nature, Contemporary Canadian Installation (four artists) at the Doland Modern Art Museum in Shanghai, China and the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre in Hong Kong in 2004. In Abyss (2007) Helena Hadala produces a subtle work based on

counter shapes of freely drawn yang and yin geometrical shapes superimposed with drawing that together produce heightened quietude. Paresh Athparia creates highly original artworks titled Om, Kundalini and Gaja Mandala in gouache on handmade paper. Pat Strakowski presents an omniscient Moondonna II.

Calgary is a FIRE city (according to Taoist thought). We can think of the Calgary Flames, capitalism, rapid growth and expansion during its boom cycles.

In contrast, therefore, it is encouraging to find a group of artists, the Meeting Point Artists Association, who for twenty years have quietly pursued a quest for Utopia. Their EAST/WEST artistic meeting points in their art become places for retreat and enable Calgary to achieve a sense of balance. The Meeting Point Artists Association renews Calgary's long-standing artistic tradition of art for art's sake and provides Calgary with a transformative purpose to what the world needs now.

## Nancy Townshend

July 2008

- i Sherman Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art*, (New York: Prentice-Hall and Abrams, 1964) 356.
- ii Lap Lam has served as president and vice-president of the Meeting Point Artists Association since its founding in 1988.
- iii Simon Wong in an email dated July 27, 2008 to Nancy Townshend.
- iv Helena Hadala in an email dated July 26, 2008 to Nancy Townshend.
- v Simon Wong in an email dated July 27, 2008 to Nancy Townshend.
- vi Isabelle Hunt - Johnson in an email dated July 28, 2008 to Nancy Townshend.
- vii Lap Lam in and email to Dr. Morley Hollenberg as forwarded to Nancy Townshend, August 14, 2008.
- viii Jack Wise affectionately referred to Chin Shek Lam as "his brother" in a note to Nancy Townshend in 1981.



# JOSETTE KHU

*The Rockies I, Watercolour, 15 x 27 cm*

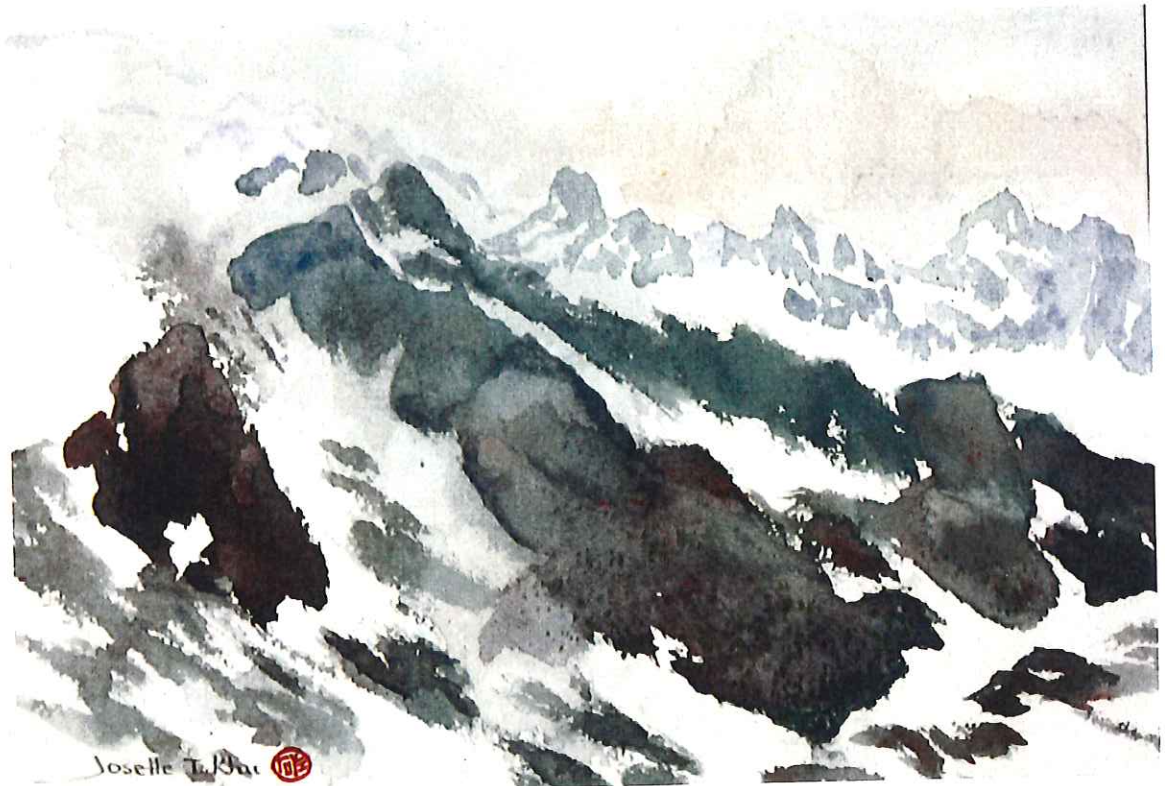


My purpose is to express the moods and nuances of nature and bring life to paper: simply, directly and freely. Since I am bicultural, my paintings show the influences of both East and West.

# JOSETTE KHU

## CONTACT

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*The Rockies II, watercolour, 18.5 x 27 cm*

## EDUCATION

- ◆ St. Louis University, St. Louis Missouri, U.S.A. B.Sc.
- ◆ Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A. studied illustration
- ◆ Also studied under Ade de Bethune

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- ◆ Virginia Christopher Galleries, Calgary 1990
- ◆ Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, Alberta. 1987

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- ◆ "Spaces and Places", Alberta Art Foundation travelling show, Canada. U.S. H. K. Chine, Japan 1986
- ◆ "The Cult of the Mountain in B.C. Painting." Simon Fraser Art Gallery, Vancouver B.C. 1989
- ◆ "Grand Canadian Rockies." Centennial Gallery, Calgary, 1992
- ◆ Meeting Point Artists Association/Hong Kong Visual Arts Society International Exchange: Fung Ping Sha Museum, Hong Kong 1994

## AWARDS

- ◆ Purchase Award, Alberta Art Foundation
- ◆ Grand Prize, competition for 1991 calendar Calgary Real Estate Board
- ◆ Sunshine Village Purchase Award

## COLLECTIONS

- ◆ Alberta Art Foundation
- ◆ Cold Lake Hospital, Cold Lake, Alberta
- ◆ Cook, Duke and Cox
- ◆ Rocky View Hospital, Calgary
- ◆ Sunshine Village, Banff, Alberta
- ◆ Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff