

Press Release

(Houston, TX – Jan 6, 2021) **Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA)** is pleased to announce, “Portal of Healing,” a solo exhibition featuring the immersive installation by Rachel Gonzales, which opens at the Fondren Library from January 15th to March 31st, 2021.



Installation View, “Portal of Healing”, 2021.
Acrylic and pencil on canvas.
Photo: Ann Shi

Created from the end of the tumultuous year of 2020 to an uncertain beginning of 2021, “Portal of Healing” is a site-specific custom piece in collaboration with the Houston Asian American Archive with excerpts from Asian American narratives and poetry of Wei-Huan Chen and Jenah Maravilla. A work to hold space for human experiences to “cross the bridge together” to 2021 (quoted from the artist’s late father), spans across the entire space of Information Commons. It is an emotional landscape that literally serves as a bridge from one end of the gallery to another, enveloping the space for contemplation, while figuratively connecting past, present, and future through the storytelling of Asian American narratives melded with the artist’s own visual artistry.

“Portal of Healing” is an experiential work of art, a traversal gateway, and a sanctuary for prayer and meditation. Calligraphically inscribed words and poems levitate, echo, and resonate with the gestural brushstrokes made by the artist. Voices they spoke through the

Archive, dancing and jamming on canvas with the ink— a “rock bottom,” “leveled me to the ground...” as Wei-Huan Chen writes in his poem, among other writers, were frenetically inscribed, seemingly randomly, yet lyrically choreographed, across the abstract components of the work.

With acrylic and pencil on unprimed canvases, paired using a minimal color, Gonzales’s oversized gestural mark-making intuitively pays homage to the classical Asian landscape scrolls and calligraphic strokes, with the freehand brushwork giving in to layers of black and white, achieved with the use of one color of paint. By claiming the “female gaze” in her own terms, Gonzales contests tradition with intuition and empathy, challenges us to see beyond the physical realm.

About the Artist:

Rachel Gonzales is a Filipina American figurative and abstract contemporary visual artist educated and experienced in both architecture and fine art. She graduated from Rice University with a Bachelors in Architecture in 2010. Informed by her architectural background in designing physical spaces, her paintings also serve as containers or portals for the human experience.

Her life's work focuses on reclaiming “the female gaze” as a deeper way to see beyond the form. Gonzales works mostly with acrylic on canvas, watercolor on paper, and ink or chalk on paper. Her work pays homage to the abstract contemporary reminiscent of Cy Twombly's "romantic symbolism," with intentional mark-making and drips of color fused words that fades like a fleeting memory; as well as figurative works in which the essence of a person and the subject with a gaze of their own is instilled. Her work is visceral, raw and forthright in response to her own personal experience and understanding of human nature. She titles her works accordingly to point to exactly what it is she is processing when creating each piece.



The exhibition is organized by Ann Shi, Associate Curator at Houston Asian American Archive and funded by the Chao Center for Asian Studies. Special thanks to Amanda Focke, Head of Special Collections, Fondren Library; and to Helen Pu, Sonia He, Ashley Tsang, and Emily Ma, Rice student interns of HAAA.

We are especially thankful for the writers in the Houston Asian American community who submitted their writings for the inscription texts.

Public Programs:

An artist’s talk with Rachel Gonzales that was livestreamed on Jan 23rd, is viewable on the YouTube channel of Houston Asian American Archive.

“Fondren After Dark | Embodying Healing,” dance performance by Filipina-American dancer, Rea Sampilo, in response to the immersive installation, will be released on February 28th, 2021.

About the Houston Asian American Archive

Inaugurated in 2010, founded and led by Dr. Anne S. Chao, the Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA) is a research and community outreach project focusing on the lives and experiences of Asian and Asian American community in the greater Houston region. It is managed by the Chao Center for Asian Studies and housed at the Woodson Research Center of the Fondren Library at Rice University. With over 300 oral history interviews in both digital and physical archives, and items of memorabilia in its collection, HAAA serves with the mission to create an inclusive portrayal of the Houston Asian and Asian American community and to provide a documentary history linking these life stories to larger national, regional, and global narratives.

Website: haaa.rice.edu

Social Media: @RiceHAAA, #HoustonAsianAmericanArchive, #HealwithHAAA

Hours & Admission: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition, located at Fondren Library, allows a limited number of public visits which can be reserved through <https://calendly.com/visithaaa/healing>.

For library hours, please visit <https://library.rice.edu/>.

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