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## **AGGV exhibition imagines artist Lee Nam, Emily Carr's contemporary.**

Who was Lee Nam and how did he and Emily Carr become friends?

The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria presents a new exhibition on June 3, titled *With wings like clouds hung from the sky* 大鵬就振翼 by Montreal-based artist Karen Tam. For this exhibition, Tam recreates the 1930's era artist's studio of Lee Nam, a Chinese immigrant painter who worked on Cormorant Street in Victoria. Taking inspiration from a description provided in Emily Carr's journal entries, Tam re-imagines the artist's studio with "an organ among all his pictures, neat surroundings, Chinese books and pictures, flowers, bowl of goldfish, photo of a Chinese girl, and on top of the organ is a Chinese calendar with various Chinese photos and an abacus."

Largely shunned by Victoria's conservative society, Carr supported herself renting apartments in her Simcoe Street home; she also used it to exhibit art. She didn't show just her own pieces, she also displayed work by others, including Lee Nam. She wrote of him in her book, *The House of All Sorts*.

*"A young Chinese came to my door carrying a roll of painting. He had heard about the exhibition, had come to show his work to me - beautiful watercolours done in Oriental style. He was very anxious to carry his work further...I invited him to show ... and he hung a beautiful exhibition."*

"The presence of the artist can be evoked through the material environment and reimagined space," said artist, Karen Tam. "By encountering the studio, one encounters the artist and the difficulties and prejudices he faced. I am not trying to reconstruct or preserve the artist's studio but to evoke the social context and cultural environment in which he worked. I worked in collaboration with a senior artist in Montreal, Lui Luk Chun, to investigate the experiences of Chinese artists working in Canada."

Lee Nam's friendship with Emily Carr was unusual for the time, based on cross-cultural interest and curiosity, as well as a shared sense of isolation, both artists being considered as outsiders from the mainstream of Victoria's conservative society. Carr recorded in her journals that Lee wanted to take art lessons from her, while she was interested in the methods and techniques of Chinese brush painting. This context and possibility of mutual influence is of tremendous significance.

"Karen has invited several Chinese-Canadian artists in Victoria, including Kileasa Wong, Andy Lou, Richard Wong and Lifu to include their work in this installation," said exhibition curator Haema Sivanesan. "Tam's installation provides a context for a deeper consideration of Asian immigrant artists, their sites of artistic production, their contribution and reception in Canada."

*With wings like clouds hung from the sky* 大鵬就振翼 opens on June 3 with a free public open house from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and runs through September 4 at the AGGV.

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