

Asian-American Experience At Lehman Gallery

By **FRANCINE SILVERMAN**

Personal perspectives on the Asian-American experience are movingly portrayed in the current exhibit, "Four Story Building," at the Lehman College Art Gallery. Four contemporary Chinese and Japanese-American artists use personal possessions that reflect their roots and the immigrant experience to build a narrative. These salvaged possessions, reads the catalogue, are "the past reverberating into the present...fragmentary narratives of the self... driven by the urgency to tell."

The curator, Skowmon Hastanan, explained that she asked artists she was familiar with who worked with narrative themes to create a new body of works for the show. "I would visit

(their studios) regularly," she said. "I am also an artist. I understand where they are coming from."

Artist Carol Sun, who grew up in the Bronx and now lives in Brooklyn, collects urban refuse to create everyday objects and representations. On one wall are a series of plates, each depicting an object frozen in time - a broom, a tin can, an umbrella, a tree branch rendered across a No Parking sign.

But time ticks away nevertheless in the surrounding silent clocks branded with mundane images. "She juxtaposed something still and something moving," explained Hastanan. "Her concern is living in a fast-paced modern society. She tries to slow down things going on so fast."

Tomie Arai turns to family

bonds and the images they evoke in "The Family Meal" and the "Family Album." The latter is a family chronology with large photo-negative portraits. The images are obscure, which, according to Hastanan, is reflective of the Asian family. "They are not being seen clearly by another - they're not being perceived or understood by others." The artist also played with the sequence and included strangers in the album, testing the notion of authenticity. Indeed, in composing the album, imagination melded with history and memory to the point where the artist was "making up a story about myself and beginning to believe it was true."

Less obscure but equally intimate are the relics of childhood, and in "Birth Gifts, 1961," Lynne Yamamoto resurrects doll fragments from her early years in Honolulu, Hawaii. In Japanese tradition, gifts of miniature dolls are given to celebrate a girl's birth. Through age 13, the artist displayed her birth gifts on March 3rd to celebrate Girls Day and Hina Matsuri - the hina doll festival. Two faded photographs of her with some of those dolls help viewers appreciate their original setting.

Now ravaged by time, the dolls are perched on thin glass inserted into 13 wooden beams of varying heights to represent the artist's growth. "She calls it 'Forest of Memories,'" said Hastanan, pointing to the grass beneath each



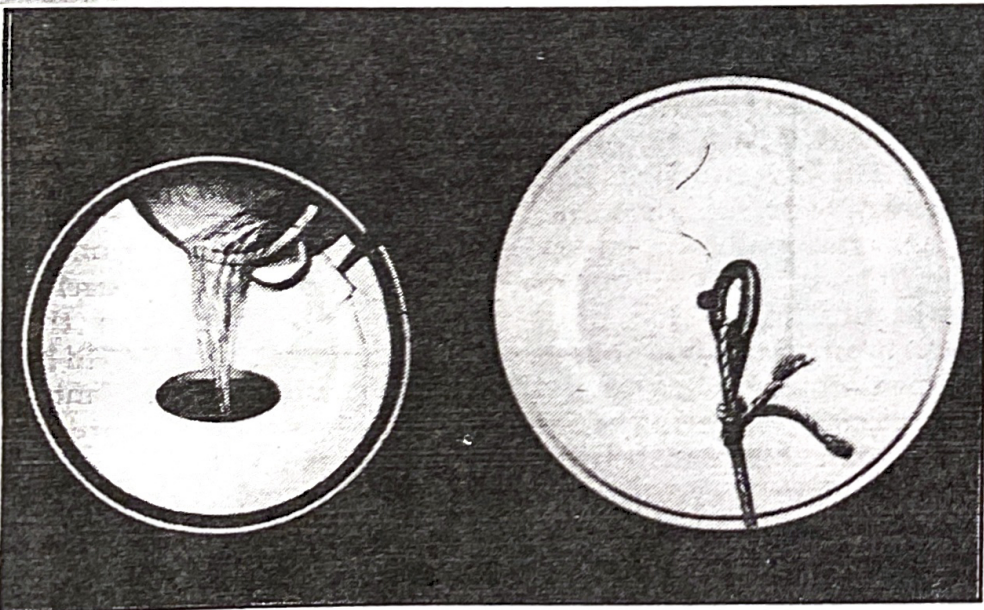
"Birth Gifts, 1961" by Lynne Yamamoto is part of the current exhibit at the Lehman College Art Gallery, 4-Story Building: Contemporary Asian American Artists, on view through April 3.

beam. "It's her longing for something she can identify with and where she came from."

In the most jarring display, Ken Chu declares his homosexuality using startling images and political statements to help dispel cultural and gender stereotypes. He recasts the popular Ken doll into a conflicted Asian Ken in a series of allegorical scenarios. There's Ken outstretched in a cross-like stance, haloed by the HIV virus and wrapped waist

down in a condom-laden American flag; there's Ken, "Bound By Tradition" to another icon of "maleness," GI Joe, and to the Madonna. A surrounding ring of MSG represents sticky rice, gay slang for the attraction between two Asian males.

"Recollecting a Self: Four Stories" runs through April 7. Hours at the gallery, 250 Bedford Blvd. West, are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call 718-960-8732.



Pour and Ties, ceramic dishes with acrylic paint are two works in a series by Carol Sun on exhibit at the Lehman College Art Gallery through Sunday, April 3.