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**BUCKHAM GALLERY** presents

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**CHINA June 4, 1989 An Art Exhibition**

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**October 7 - November 26, 1994**

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**134 1/2 W. Second St., Flint, Michigan**

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**organized by the Asian American Art Centre, NYC**

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**CHINA June 4, 1989 An Art Exhibition**

# **“The spectacle of deadly military force used against the student movement in Beijing has left us shocked and outraged.**

The brutal killing of perhaps thousands of unarmed students and civilians portends the beginning of a situation that can lead to disaster, engulfing the whole of China. What can be done to express our anger and horror? What can we do that will be effective and have some meaningful purpose? “We as human beings are heir to events sometimes accidental, sometimes intentional that crush tears and sorrows from our pores and our beings. We cry out and reach out to each other to repulse this horrible thing that nevertheless brings an awakening to our spirits. We seek to touch one another, to reach across barriers of race and culture. We seek to touch something in our souls and express our mutual humanity and our human and cultural diversity.”

(statement made by the Asian American Art Centre, June 9, 1989)

**CHINA June 4, 1989 An Art Exhibition**



## **CHINA: June 4, 1989 An Art Exhibition** **the show marking the Chinese people's quest for liberty is itself refused the right to free expression.**

The Tiananmen Memorial Art Exhibition, sponsored by Congressman Tom Lantos and John Porter, Co-Chairman of the Congressional human Rights Foundation, and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, was mounted to support the campaign for human rights in the People's Republic of China and to commemorate the first anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989. However, when three artworks were excluded from the exhibition, the issue of freedom of expression in the United States was unavoidably introduced. These artworks were: "The Last Banquet" by Hongtu Zhang, "The Very very small Number of People" by Byron Kim, and "Wall" by Hung Kwong-chak from Hong Kong.

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"The Last Banquet", ( illustration on page15) a painting based on Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" which replaced each figure with that of Mao Tse-Tung, was censored because it was seen as a parody of a religious theme. Byron Kim placed a standing figure illustrating acupuncture meridian points in the center of a bird cage encircled by test tubes of blood. Aspects of voodoo were perceived in this sculpture. The painting, "Wall", consisted of large stones piled up to form a wall in which three bodies were embedded, two parents and their baby, clearly victims of the repression in Tiananmen Square. Abortion policy in China, it seems, was raised and it too was censored.

Given the highly visible nature of Congressional office buildings, art work that has the potential to be objectionable "to a small girl from Iowa" is eliminated. The Russell Rotunda is an office building whose visitors, apparently, do not expect to be offended by art works.



"Eight years ago, I moved to the United States from China in order to have freedom to paint. Should I now move again from the United States to.....the moon for the same reason?

"I have heard that when frogs are cooked, first the live frogs are put in cold water, so that they feel free and happy, then you heat up the water very slowly, so that the frog can adjust until it is boiling. In this way the frogs die without feeling pain. Some powerful people are robbing artists of freedom of expression in much the same way. I have personally felt the water getting hotter since June 16, 1990, the day I was told the "Last Banquet" had been rejected.

"Of course, the United States is not China, and artists, after all, are a little smarter than frogs. We can do something to make the water stay cold, and thus avoid death by boiling. Freedom is not something that drops from heaven, we have to fight for it, we have to protect it ourselves."

- Hongtu Zhang

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"I am a Korean American on the margins of the art world. One of the definitions of marginality is that which is barely provided for. The way this country's art economy works, artists on the fringe, i.e. female artists and artists of color, have much less opportunity to exhibit their work in commercial venues. We are more likely to be seen through alternative galleries and museums that are in large part supported by the NEA and other governmental arts agencies. It is on the margins of culture that real change always begins, and art is about nothing if it is not about change. Even a small restriction on the NEA will have devastating effects on the minority arts community especially. If we limit one artist's rights, we limit the freedom of a culture, and we are on our way backward toward the repressive system we are protesting in China. We must not let certain politicians bully the arts because if their misperceptions and prejudices about who artists are. Artists willing to speak out, willing to make political statements may be the first to lose their rights, but others will surely follow." - Byron Kim

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