

Keynote Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

Asian Canadian Women Artists (ACWA) Opening First Exhibition

October 30, 2002

On behalf of the Senate of Canada, I welcome everyone to the opening of the first ever Asian Canadian Women Artists Exhibition (ACWA) in the beautiful city of Montreal. Congratulations to the ACWA on this very important occasion.

Montréal est l'un des plus grands centres culturels et diversifiés du Canada. Montréal est une ville qui bouge et qui a toujours été ouverte sur le monde. Une population d'origine asiatique continue d'augmenter et à contribuer à la richesse culturelle et artistique de la ville.

As many of you may know, I was a fashion designer in my other life, and I have been a painter since I was 5 years old. I started painting because I was moved by the beautiful sunsets we used to see in Hong Kong. From sunsets, I progressed to flowers, then birds, then people. From the age of about 10, I also studied traditional Chinese painting, until my early teens. My favourite mediums are ink, and watercolours.

As someone who understands the arts, and as a long-time supporter of the arts, I believe that artists contribute substantially to the beauty in our lives, and to the life of our cities. I don't want to even imagine how dull life would be without art. In our multicultural society, art and culture share a unique heritage. Today, I am delighted to celebrate the artistic achievements of a group of outstanding Asian Canadian women artists.

Les Canadiennes d'origine asiatique qui oeuvrent dans le domaine des arts occupent collectivement un rôle important dans le milieu artistique dynamique qui existe à Montréal. Vos rapports avec le monde des arts à Montréal passent par une démarche constructive d'échanges culturels, de collaboration et de partage de connaissances.

The mission of the ACWA is to promote Asian culture in Canada, through the works of artists of Asian origin. Asian arts have a long-history,

having been passed down from master to student, in a tradition that goes back thousands of years. The art we see in this exhibition carries on this rich tradition. It is very detailed, and refined, emphasizing the importance of artistic technique, as well as the subjects. This exhibition includes work from Canadians of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Philippino heritage.

The artistic techniques used are as diverse as the heritage. There are acrylics, wood-cuts, sumie, mixed media, batik, and etchings. The art in this exhibition shares a quality – and that quality is the intangible element of beauty.

As you can see, I'm proud to be wearing an outfit that was made from batik on silk. The fabric was bought from a batik factory in Penang, Malaysia, a few years ago. As far as I know, this technique is unique to South-East Asia.

As Asian Canadians, our identity is closely tied to our heritage, since, no matter how far we are physically away from our countries of origin, we always stand out from the crowd. In multicultural Canada, we recognize that Asian culture is not stagnant or unchanging. Instead, it is constantly growing and evolving. Both our past, and our present, are an integral part of how we define ourselves, and of course, Canada is being redefined by its artists – by people like you.

Art is, and will continue to be, central to the Asian Canadian communities' development and maturation. However, if Asian artists are to continue to thrive in Canada, we will need a commitment from government, and from institutions, as well as from the public, recognizing that this is an essential part of our Canadian culture.

This exhibition, along with other recently developed artistic projects by Asian-Canadians, indicate that many aspects of Asian-Canadian art have come of age. We are using a range of artistic techniques, whether visual, dance, writing, or multi-media, to tell our unique stories. By so doing, we are redefining what it means to be Canadian.

I congratulate our dynamic group of women on the presentation of their beautiful work, and their commitment to their cultural traditions.

I know this show will become an increasingly important annual event here in Montreal. I wish you all great success, and an enjoyable evening.