

# A taste of Chinese culture

BY JOANNE F. VILLENEUVE

The Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba looks like a Chinese restaurant these days.

Elements from Chinese culture are the focus of two new exhibits opening tomorrow at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.

In the main gallery, the installation by the AGSM's first artist-in-residence, Karen Tam of Montreal, is a reconstruction of sorts of a Chinese restaurant.

"I come from a long line of Chinese restaurateurs. My parents owned a restaurant for about 26 years and it was my second childhood home," said Tam, whose AGSM residency spans five weeks — three to build the installation and two to work with the gallery's art educator.

"I first wanted to document this place, snapping lots of photographs, and I had always been interested in the history of the Chinese community in Canada — their immigration, their experiences and such — and so, it was a gradual development."

Through her research, the multi-media artist discovered that there were few opportunities available to her predecessors upon their arrival to this country.

Running a grocery store, a



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Artist-in-residence Karen Tam, with the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, has re-created the surrounding of a diner kitchen as part of her upcoming exhibit that opens Thursday evening.

laundromat or a restaurant were about the only options.

"This whole new cuisine

developed out of this," said Tam, commenting on the restaurant menu.

"It was based on Cantonese cuisine, but the ingredients weren't available. So, they used locally available stuff and adapted it to Western taste. It just grew from there."

With her installation, Tam wants to integrate this background information as well as touch upon the racism and the stereotyping the Chinese faced here.

"I also want to show this other side of the Chinese restaurant that I think most people don't have access to," she said.

"For most, it's just going to the Chinese restaurant to eat, but not realizing the hardship, the suffering, the actual life behind the restaurant."

In the community gallery, the work of visiting Nanjing University professor Xiren Qian, who is finishing a teaching exchange at Brandon University, features traditional calligraphy and painting from his homeland.

Tam's installation, No MSG at Friendship Dinner (Nor Cats), and Qian's exhibit, Feeling in Ink and Colour, open tomorrow at 7:30 p.m., at the AGSM, located on the second floor, 710 Rosser Ave.

An artist talk follows at 8 p.m.

Admission is free.

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