

# LETHBRIDGE HERALD

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## ORIENTALLY yours

SAAG exhibit takes a look at the cultural background of Chinese restaurants

By ANNE-MARIE JACKSON  
Lethbridge Herald

Chinese restaurants are commonplace but past the egg roll delights and fortune cookie wisdom, food is just one element of Chinese-Canadian culture. Karen Tam's *Orientally Yours* exhibit, opening at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, will examine how restaurants mirror the constructed identity of Chinese immigrant culture nationwide.

"I had an idea that if people couldn't go to the real China, the closest thing would be a Chinese restaurant," said Tam. "I want to make people aware. When you walk into a Chinese restaurant you just think about the food but there is much more than that."

During the next week, Tam will visit Chinese establishments and collect pieces to use in her display in preparation for the official opening Saturday from 5-7 p.m.

From artwork and furniture, to photos and video collections, each element of Tam's makeshift restaurant highlights the success of local owners.

"It's not going to be based on one particular store but on the history of immigrants in Canada and the experience of restaurateurs," said Tam. "There are Chinese restaurants everywhere you go and I wanted to travel across the country and see what the similarities and differences are. I found they are mostly the same."

The Montreal artist is drawing inspiration from local businesses including Shanghai Chop Suey, Peking Gardens Restaurant, Hong Kong Gardens among others.

Tam hopes to identify some common misconceptions between authentic and westernized tradition, as is the case with favourite dishes such as chop suey or wonton soup, which were popularized in North America rather than China.

Her research has helped develop her art and learn the history of Chinese families. Tam has completed about eight exhibits across Canada. During a visit to Halifax, she met a woman whose family was the first farmers in the Maritimes. In Kelowna, she met the first Chinese male teacher in Canada.

"I have heard some great stories," she said with a laugh. "I'm related to everyone. It's true to a certain extent. A lot of the older generations of immigrants came from the same village or area."

While Tam collects more stories on her travels, the Lethbridge exhibit will be open until June 10.

For more information, visit [www.saag.ca](http://www.saag.ca) or [www.karentam.ca](http://www.karentam.ca), residents can donate items for Tam's exhibit this week by calling the SAAG at 327-8770.

Tam holds a MFA in sculpture from The Art Institute of Chicago, as well as a BFA from Concordia University. She has participated in a number of exhibitions and artist residencies across Canada, in Ireland and the United States. Her 2002, video *Plum Sauce* won the Audience Choice award at Chicago's Asian American Film Festival.



HERALD PHOTO BY NORM LEBUS

Montreal native Karen Tam is installing her traveling art exhibit of a Chinese restaurant from the 1960s all this week at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery. Here, she poses across the street from SAAG, in front of her muse.