

BERKELEY TIMES

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Love Letter #3 – 36 inches square, acrylic on canvas, by Betty Kano, 1992. This painting is just one of the marvelous and historical artworks now being exhibited at Berkeley Art Center as part of the current show, *In the Presence Of: Collective Histories of the Asian American Women Artists Association*, now through April 20. • 2. At the opening reception, *The Last Hoisan Poets* – (from left) Genny Lim, Nellie Wong, and Flo Oy Wong – recited poems inspired by the culturally referencing artworks. For a deeper dive into this show, turn to page 14.

AAWAA @ BAC: *In The Presence Of* BY R. TODD KERR

A capacity crowd filled Berkeley Art Center on Saturday, Jan. 27 for the opening reception of “In the Presence Of: Collective Histories of the Asian American Women Artists Association,” a blockbuster exhibit of artworks and poems curated by Christina Hiromi Hobbs. This show reflects on decades of artistic expression by a community of women artists strug-

gling for recognition, and it references a specific Chinese culture imported from Hoisan, one of the districts within the Pearl River Delta, which took root in Chinatown, San Francisco.

The reception featured poetry inspired by the artworks in this exhibition that was recited by *The Last Hoisan Poets* – Genny Lim, Nellie Wong, and Flo Oy Wong, each of whom was closely

involved with the AAWAA. For highlights, turn to page 14.

Berkeley Art Center is located at 1275 Walnut St., on the edge of Live Oak Park. This show runs through Apr. 20, and admission is free. For news/announcements of upcoming events related to “In The Presence Of,” go to berkeleyartcenter.org, or call (510) 644-6893.



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AAWAA @ BAC: IN THE PRESENCE OF

Veil of Tears

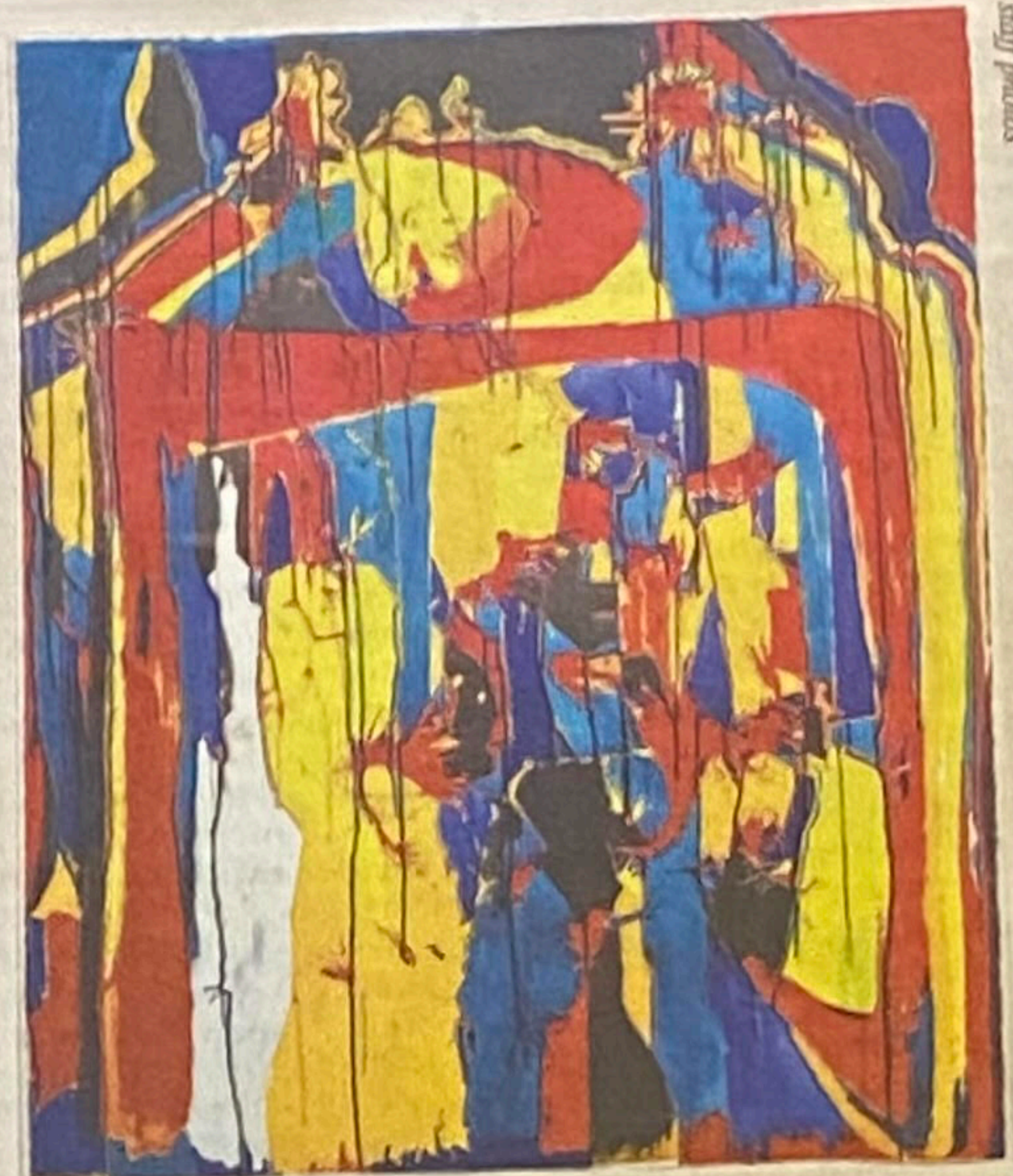
BY FLO OY WONG – JANUARY 17, 2024, INSPIRED BY HER OWN PAINTING TIANANMEN SQUARE

Brushes dipped in hues of ink,
Veil of Tears trickle.
 At Gate of Heavenly Peace
 turbulence spews.
 Shadows of dying quilt the square.
LOOK!
 Terror shrieks.
*Ai Yaaaaaa!**
 Bulleted bodies topple.
 Blood splatters.
*Hoong hoot liuuuuu!***
TASTE!
 Crimson blood gushes.
SNIFF!
 Stench of smoking gunpowder.
Dragons hushed.
No pounding the drums.
Gongs no longer song.
Death reigns.

Grandfathers, grandmothers
Fathers mothers
Brothers sisters
Y O W L!
*Aiiiii Yaaaaa!**
Hoong Hoot
*LIUUUUUUUUUUU!***

Author's notes:
 **Ai Yaaaaaa!* is *Hoisan-wa*, my ancestral dialect for "oh no"
 ** *Hoong Hoot LIUUUUUUUUUUU!* is *Hoisan-wa*, my ancestral dialect for "red blood flows."

Tiananmen Square – 62 x 52 inches, ink painting with brush, by Flo Oy Wong, 1989.



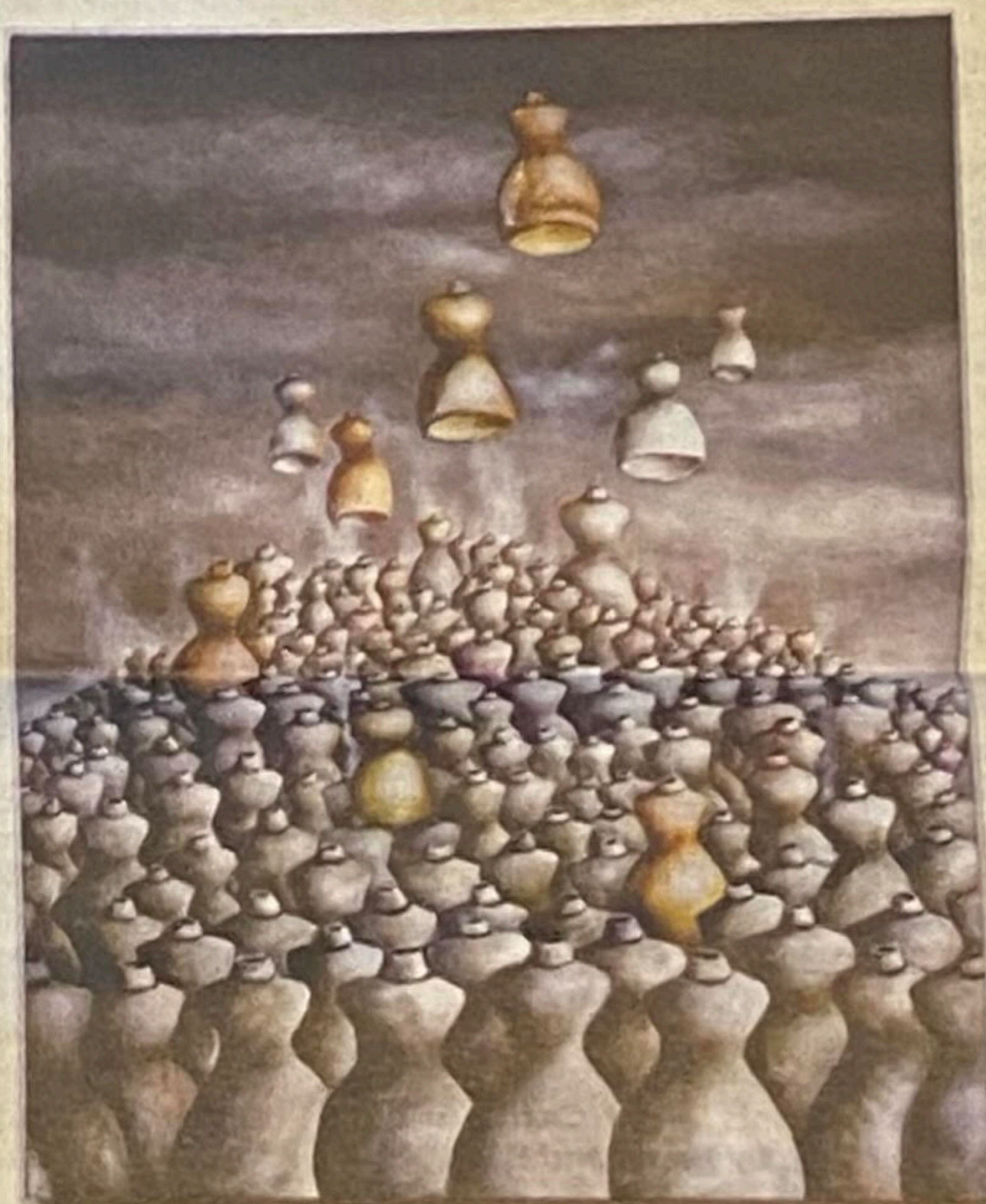
Song of Labor

BY NELLIE WONG, 2022 – INSPIRED BY THE PAINTING, "FLYING LESSONS, INQUIRE WITHIN" BY CYNTHIA TOM.

When you stitch the kingfisher
 Diving for fish
 When you touch silk strands
 Forming a peony, a firefly
 Misting around a girl plowing earth
 In dawn's light
 When you carry water from a well
 To boil rice, steam a piece of cuttlefish
When your feet peddle
Blue jeans, a crisp white shirt, a ball gown
 When you tailor a suit of wool
 in hounds' tooth, glen plaid or dizzying stripes
 when you sort chicken bones
 from daily garbage
 when you search for discarded bread,
 barely-worn shoes
 when your heart rises a moon

intent as a blacksmith's arms
 when you sing a ditty of pig's intestines thrown
 onto fields, chickens squawking
 when you keep your daughter
 because she is female
 when you picket
 for stolen wages
 when you talk back
to mother-in-law
 when you stay up to watch the sun rise
 when you learn English
 and still speak your native tongue
 when hope glints
 from a bowl of porridge
 when debt is postponed
 when you cross borders.

Flying Lessons, Inquire Within – 48 x 36 inches, acrylic and gold leaf on canvas, by Cynthia Tom, 2023.



The Diamond Sutra

BY GENNY LIM

Hidden away under eternal sky
 On a clear, cold night
 Dunhuang Temple moon
 where the ideogram for heart
 Is carved above the Cave of No Return
 Auspicious clouds dust a thousand caves
 Which are sealed or unsealed with
 the Diamond that cuts through all
 Wherever you come, wherever you go
 You hear the conch of the ocean's roar
 And the smell of samadhi's firewood
 Burning away worldly thought
 Kuan Yin, Goddess of Compassion
 lightly presses her finger
 Into the mudra of teaching
 And a thousand Buddhas appear in
 The clear light of the Perfection of Wisdom
 As above, so below
 Heaven and earth are bound
 Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha
 The moon holds up a branch of sky
 Over the quiet grottos
 Deer dance through desert walls
 Cicadas chirp the Prajnaparamita Sutra
 All night long in praise of emptiness
 Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha
 With age, the heart grows weak
 And the body decrepit

But the heart of the Buddha retains
 The warmth of a thousand lamps
 Even as the painted lotus at her feet
 the five-jeweled crown on her head
 the Sangha of Arhats, Bodhisattvas
 Guardians, Dakinis and Deities fade
 Into the smoke of the human realm
 where samsara and never-ending war
 keep the Wheel of Yama
 Lord of Death, spinning, grinning
 The Buddha never gives up
 On a single being

BUT...



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AAWAA 35th Anniversary Mandala (detail) – 48 inches in diameter, mixed media by Nancy Hom, 2024.

