

TACOMA ART MUSEUM

MEDIA RELEASE

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This Summer Art Meets History in Two New Exhibitions at Tacoma Art Museum

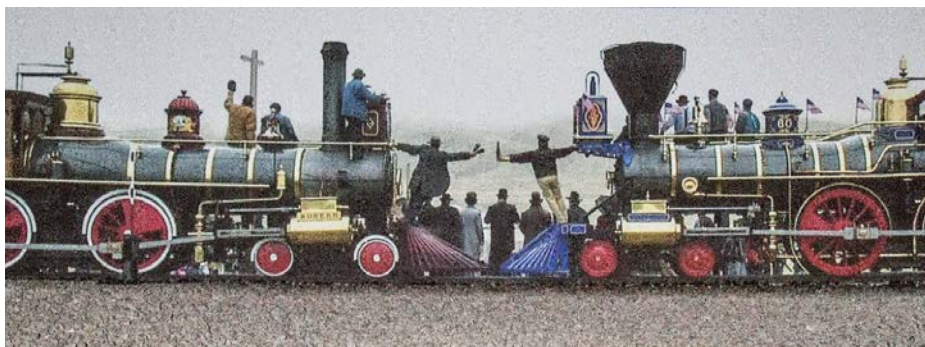


Tacoma, WA – This June, Tacoma Art Museum (TAM) opens two exhibitions inspired by the complex history of the transcontinental railroads in the West: *Zhi LIN: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads*, opening June 27, 2017 and *Promoting the West: Abby Williams Hill and the Railroads*, which opened June 3, 2017. Through two very different viewpoints the artworks in these exhibitions explore the impact of the western

expansion of the railroads on individuals, notably the Chinese laborers who helped build them and an artist who helped shape their public image.

Internationally acclaimed artist Zhi LIN has refocused attention on the forgotten yet vital history of the 19th-century Chinese laborers in the western United States. Thousands of men migrated from China to seek fortunes in the gold mines of California but, instead, only found work building the transcontinental railroads. The first transcontinental railroad was constructed from 1863 to 1869 and was celebrated as a technical marvel because of its great length and the wide variety of terrain it crossed. The feat was successfully accomplished due largely to the contributions by Chinese men who did the back-breaking work of cutting through the mountains and across the deserts of the American West. They are rarely recognized in American history and this absence is an animating force in Lin's work.

Lin began exploring this history in 2006 creating a series of watercolor sketches of the landscape along the route of the first transcontinental railroad through California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. In 2013, he began to paint abstractions that marked the tragedies and casualties resulting from the dangerous work completed by Chinese migrants on the transcontinental railroad across the Sierra Nevada. *Zhi LIN: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads* includes images from both these bodies of work, as well as new works specifically about the Chinese experience in Tacoma. Works on view will include ink paintings of realist scenes of historic importance and abstract paintings measuring more than 20 feet in length, and a monumental video and sound installation of the annual reenactment of the "marriage of the rails" at the Golden Spike National Historic Site near Promontory Summit, Utah.



Lin's paintings resonate in our region and nationally. Their content is amplified by the legacy of historical racism that was exacerbated by contentious labor relations during the

construction of the railroads, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The federal act barred ethnic Chinese from migrating to the United States. Such laws encouraged acts of violence and vigilantism against the Chinese migrants already living here, including the forced expulsion of Chinese people from Tacoma in 1885. The Act was not repealed until 1943.

Lin explains his intent, “In the midst of the current anti-immigrant environment, it is not very hard for anyone to imagine these tragic events. Yesterday’s Chinese migrants are today’s people from our southern border. I use the contradictions represented in the artwork to call to mind our responsibilities to history and to refute the ignorance and cruelty of our society and of ourselves.”

TAM's Deputy Director and Chief Curator Rock Hushka adds, “Zhi Lin’s artworks highlight the rich and vital history of Chinese migrants and immigrants in the American West. We are grateful to Lin for his new research into the history of Chinese people in Tacoma. The exhibition offers an important context for us to share his perspective and an invaluable opportunity for us to discuss the legacy of our past through the work of a leading Northwest artist art.”

Lin studied printmaking at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. In 1989, he earned a Higher Diploma in Fine Art (equivalent to a master of fine arts degree in the US) from Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. In 1992, he also earned a master of fine arts degree from the University of Delaware. Today, Lin teaches painting at the University of Washington as the Floyd and Delores Jones Endowed Professor in the Arts. He has been awarded major grants from the Creative Capital Foundation, Lila Wallace–Reader’s Digest Artists at Giverny program, Art Matters Foundation Fellowship, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Zhi LIN: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads is part of the museum’s Northwest Perspective Series of focus exhibitions on Northwest artists. It includes a fully-illustrated catalogue co-authored by Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Shawn Wong, and Rock Hushka. The exhibition is on extended view through February 18, 2018.



Promoting the West: Abby Williams Hill and the Railroads focuses on the relationship of an individual artist with the railroad companies. Tacoma artist Abby Williams Hill (1861–1943) worked from 1903 to 1906 on paintings for two of the main western railroad companies, the Great Northern Railway and Northern Pacific Railway.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the railroads hired artists to create images of western landscapes and Native peoples to use in promotional campaigns encouraging railroad travel to the West for tourism or settlement. An avid traveler and outdoor enthusiast, Hill was excited by the unusual opportunity to spend extended time in some of the most scenic spots in the Northwest

camping and painting. She was one of the few women to secure such a commission and had to talk her way into her first assignment for the Great Northern Railway, but when she exhibited the resulting pictures, the Northern Pacific Railway was eager to hire her away for themselves.

Hill's art background was eclectic, ranging from private study in Chicago and Europe to classes at the Art Students League in New York. Hill also was an activist who advocated for a variety of social, educational, and preservationist causes. When she and her husband moved to Tacoma in 1889, she was enraptured by the great beauty all around her. The railroad commissions offered a unique chance to pursue both her interest in landscape painting and in the natural beauty of the Northwest.

From May through mid-September of 1903 Hill made several extended trips into remote spots in the North Cascade mountains to create paintings for the Great Northern Railway. From 1904 to 1906, she received commissions from the Northern Pacific Railway to paint additional views around the Northwest and in Yellowstone National Park. Hill also considered these painting expeditions great educational opportunities and always took along several of her four children.

“These serene landscapes hide some fascinating history,” notes TAM curator Margaret Bullock. “Hill was painting these outdoors in all kinds of weather and sometimes from very precarious perches. In Yellowstone she could be surrounded by tourists or sitting just beyond the railroad tracks. But the paintings show only a remote unspoiled landscape.”

The histories of the American West and the railroads in the 19th and early 20th centuries are tightly intertwined. The railroads opened up the western states to new settlers, extensive resource extraction, and tourism. Abby Williams Hill was one of a number of artists hired to create images for their advertising. They carefully selected views that suggested the West was unspoiled, unclaimed, and uniquely exciting. Their colorful, widely circulated ads greatly influenced popular opinion about how its lands and resources should be used, often to the benefit of railroad companies.

For Hill, the railroad commissions had many important impacts on her life and career. She exchanged her work for railroad tickets so that she could further her children’s education and pursue her social causes and other interests. Through exhibitions and railroad advertising, her works were seen by a very broad national audience. And the commissions allowed Hill to fully explore her interest in landscape painting and communicate her love of nature.

This exhibition has been drawn from the Abby Williams Hill Collection at University of Puget Sound, Tacoma which holds a large collection of Hill’s artwork and her archives.

Funder credits:

Zhi LIN: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads is generously supported by Propel Insurance and The National Endowment for the Arts. Seasonal Support is provided by ArtsFund.

Support for the exhibition *Promoting the West: Abby Williams Hill and the Railroads* is provided by Tacoma Arts Commission.

Image Credits (top to bottom):

Zhi LIN, *Chinese Reconciliation Park*, 2017. Chinese ink on paper, 8¾ x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Koplin Del Rio Gallery, Seattle.

Zhi LIN, detail: *"Chinaman's Chance" on Promontory Summit: Golden Spike Celebration, 12:30 pm, 10th May 1869*, 2014. HD video projection and painted granite ballast with a surround sound environment, Dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist and Koplin Del Rio Gallery, Seattle.

Abby Williams Hill, *Grotto Geyser #1*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 22 x 17 inches. Collection of University of Puget Sound. Image: ©University of Puget Sound.

Available Images for Publication

[Click here to preview all Zhi LIN and Abby Hill](#) artwork images available for reproduction. (2.4 MB PDF file)

Related Programs and Events (TacomaArtMuseum.org/Events)

Saturday, July 29, 2017, 7 – 10 pm
Members' Exhibition Celebration

Wednesday, August 2, noon – 1 pm
Lunch and Learn with acclaimed author and University of Washington Professor, Shawn Wong

November 16, Free Third Thursday, 5 – 8 pm
Q&A and art-making demonstration with Zhi LIN

February 15, 2018, Free Third Thursday, 5 – 8 pm
Community panel on immigration and exclusion

Watch our calendar at TacomaArtMuseum.org/Events for more related programs.

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Press are invited for a press tour

Tuesday, June 27, 11 am

Tacoma Art Museum, 1701 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402

RSVP for press tour by emailing: PublicRelations@TacomaArtMuseum.org

About Tacoma Art Museum

Tacoma Art Museum is an anchor in the city's downtown and a gathering space for connecting people through art. TAM's collection contains nearly 5,000 works, with an emphasis on the art and artists of the Northwest and broader western region. The collection includes the largest retrospective museum collection of glass art by Tacoma native Dale Chihuly on continuous view; the most significant museum collection of jewelry by Northwest artists; key holdings in 19th century European and 20th century American art; and one of the finest collections of Japanese woodblock prints on the West Coast. In 2014, TAM welcomed a gift of 295 works of western American art in the Haub Family Collection, one of the premier collections in the nation and the first major western American art museum collection in the Northwest. The Haub gift included \$20 million for new galleries and endowed funds. The Haub Family Galleries opened in 2014. In January 2016, TAM announced the gift of the Benaroya Collection, including 225 works of art. The donation also includes nearly \$14 million in funding for new gallery space to showcase the collection and an endowment for care of the collection. The Benaroya wing is expected to open in early 2019.

HOURS – Tuesdays–Sundays 10 am–5 pm, Third Thursdays 10 am–8 pm;
Third Thursdays free from 5-8 pm.

ADMISSION – Adult \$15, Student/Military/Senior (65+) \$13, Family \$40 (2 adults and up to 4 children under 18). Children 5 and under free. Members always free.

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