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ATELIERS UNLOCKED. Portland Open Studios is an annual self-directed tour of artists' workplaces throughout metropolitan Portland. Four Asian artists are included in this year's tour. Pictured counterclockwise from top left are: "Fatherland," an artist's book by Shu-Ju Wang; Daniel Ng working in his studio in southeast Portland; Samyak Yamauchi working in her studio in northeast Portland; and "Glory Morning Rays," a watercolor piece by Ming Wei. Ng and Yamauchi's studios will be open the weekend of October 13 and 14; Wang and Wei's studios can be viewed October 20 and 21. (Photos courtesy of Portland Open Studios)



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The savvy artist: Portland Open Studios showcases four Asians

By Josephine Bridges

Savvy isn't a word commonly associated with artists, but maybe it should be. The four Asian artists in Portland Open Studios 2007 epitomize talent, creative minds, a sense of community, and business acumen.

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Portland Open Studios is an annual self-directed tour of 98 artists' workplaces throughout metropolitan Portland. Studios are open to the public from 10:00am to 5:00pm, October 13 and 14 on the eastside, and October 20 and 21 on the westside. Visitors get to see not only paintings, prints, mosaics, collages, and artist-made books, but also artists at work.

Daniel Ng

Daniel Ng's work, as well as the artist himself, is clear proof that savvy can be fun. He calls his small paintings of toys "toy paintings," and his landscapes show the curvature of the earth because the artist likes to "exaggerate life in every way." Trained in industrial design, he has no doubt that his "hundreds and hundreds" of drawings of motorcycles were good practice, unrelated as they may appear to the vivid, skewed interiors he's known for.

Not only that, he learned as a product designer to produce marketable art and to market it well. Daniel Ng's savvy may be in part genetic. His parents encouraged him to be an artist, clearly a smart move. He has been drawing since he was a little kid, and now he has trouble keeping up with the demand for his acrylic paintings. The artist is looking forward to his first appearance in Portland Open Studios. "The great thing about doing art shows," he says, "is you get to meet your clientele."

Samyak Yamauchi

Mosaic is Samyak Yamauchi's primary focus, though she also works in collage. Unexpected flora and fauna, as well as found objects, appear in her work. She sees her art, which has both spiritual and humorous aspects, as a gift to people she may not have the privilege of meeting.

"The thing that I think is really special about my art is that it carries an intention of healing," the artist explains. New to Portland Open Studios this year, she has been making mosaics for only the past five years, but this savvy artist is already creating community based on her art. A kindergarten teacher for two and a half decades, she has spent a lot of time working on art with young people, and the children in her neighborhood visit her studio and make mosaics there. She can hardly wait until her grandchildren can join them in a few years.

Ming Wei

New to the United States and Portland Open Studios, Ming Wei's Chinese brush paintings may look traditional, but only for a short time from a considerable distance. While many Chinese watercolorists try to produce traditional work, Ming Wei strives to use techniques he has learned in western painting in combination with his classical training.

This savvy artist's work is inspired, but not derivative. The result is a three-dimensional, richly colored landscape that also has the delicacy and grace of traditional Chinese brushwork. The artist's next challenge is to use Chinese painting techniques to capture Oregon scenery.

Ming Wei has been painting since he was seven years old, but a career as a

geologist also adds depth to his work. In his 37 years travelling all over China, he learned not only the structures of individual rocks, but the scientific requirements of landscape painting. Here's one artist who will never paint a tree in the wrong ecosystem.

Shu-Ju Wang

Painter, printmaker, and book artist Shu-Ju Wang is a veteran of Portland Open Studios, making her fourth appearance this year. Not content with the status quo, this artist shows her savvy with new material and a new project outside the studio. While she has worked for some time with traditional Asian symbols by placing them in contemporary contexts or giving them modern meanings, this year she has begun to use two invented symbols, the moth and the dandelion, in her paintings.

But it's the project she is just beginning, a collaborative work that will occupy her for the next year, that's really got this artist excited. Working with six residents of Rose Schnitzer Manor with early-stage progressive memory loss, Shu-Ju Wang will create artist books that "document the urgency of communication and preservation of self in the face of increasing cognitive dysfunction, a testimonial to six lives lived on the precipice of identity loss."

The 2007 Portland Open Studios Tour Guide — which includes two tickets for all days (children are welcome and free), a 2008 calendar, a map to the studios, and contact information for all participating artists — is available at Art Media stores, New Seasons Markets, Weir's Cyclery, and other outlets listed at www.portlandopenstudios.com, and still costs only \$15.00.

"Portland Open Studios is a great opportunity for people who already love art and for people who haven't yet fallen in love," thinks publicity coordinator and website designer Bonnie Meltzer.

If you would like to represent your neighborhood next year, artist applications are due March 15, 2008. Check the website for application directions after January 1. For more information, contact Bonnie at (503) 285-3131 or e-mail info@portlandopenstudios.com.