

**“Cuts · Sharp is intended to show the subtle prejudice among us. In order to change these preconceived notions in us, we all need to allow our conscience to learn, and re-evaluate ourselves constantly.”**

**- Ping Khaw, artist and community activist**

## **Cuts · Sharp**

A visual and video exhibit by Ping Khaw

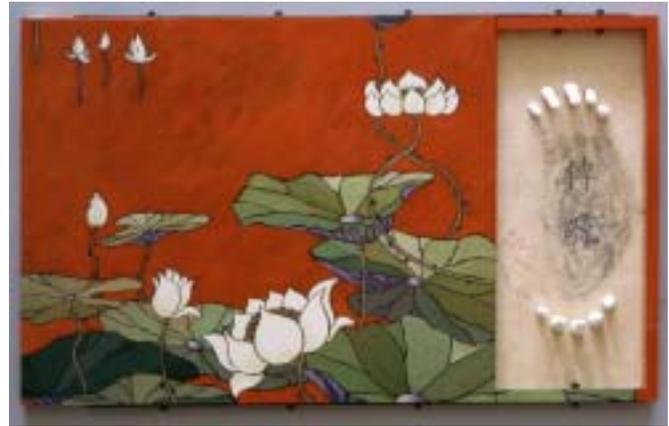
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## **White lotus, red rage**

*By Polo*

*The Asian Reporter*

Social activist and multimedia artist Ping Khaw is trying to get to the bottom of it. What “it” is – where it starts, how it takes hold – are elemental to her investigation. Originally, “it” was violence, but then “it shifted to a more fundamental inquiry into discrimination, and from there: into the roots of bigotry.”

Ms. Khaw says she began working her concept by collecting information on how each of us experience prejudice. Her research may be far from over, but she has assembled a benchmark of sorts, an exhibit entitled “Cuts · Sharp”. Its name is intended, she smiles, “as a metaphor reflecting the irony and dichotomy of individual judgment.” Discrimination, according to the artist starts out innocently and necessarily. In elementary school, little kids quickly learn to distinguish primary attributes. Kids learn to identify this color as red, that one as blue. But from where comes the emotional boost to the labels “black” or “yellow?”

While social scientists would point sharpened pencils at culture, at class and religion, as normative determinates – artist Ping Khaw provides Portlanders with her 3D installation and video narrative. White lab jacket types work at rational explanation, Ms. Khaw’s more modest goal is emotional experience. And the experience for her viewers is both startlingly immediate and deeply thought-provoking. It takes a while to absorb her message, it takes days to get over it.

One of her artistic expressions is “White Lotus,” a hanging installation primarily of acrylic, supported by sculptured hands, Chinese ideograms, and determinative diagrams commonly associated with Confucian metaphysics. The

piece attributes to woman: silence, to clean, to prepare, and to care, among other irreducible. Ms. Ping says, “the qualities become labels, then rules, we must follow.”

The white lotus, in traditional Buddhist iconology, represents purity – the goal of spiritual enlightenment. Perfection on earth. Societies are likewise convinced of their righteousness. “This way, my way, is perfect.”

“White Lotus” is of course a contradiction. Instead of the centuries-old custom of surrounding the fleshy ivory flower with serene greens, Ms. Khaw has filled her backspace with burning red.

Ping Khaw grew up in Penang, Malaysia, where she earned business accounting diploma from the Perkim Goon Institute. In 1990, she began her fine arts training at the Malaysian Institute of Art in Kuala Lumpur. Her education continued in Portland at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, where she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1993.

Ms. Khaw has since been an artist active in local community work including children’s art classes, neighborhood banners and youth murals, including the Southeast Multicultural Center’s Oral History Project (1999); the Gresham City Park (2000) and 2001 Portsmouth (2001) banner projects; and the “Perspectives on Peace” project/art exhibition (2001-2002). Her work has been shown internationally, including her 1981 entry in India’s Shankar’s International Art Competition; her participation in a group exhibit in the National Art Galleries of Penang in 1988 and Kuala Lumpur in 1990; Northwest exhibits include 1993 shows at the Portland Art Museum, Western Oregon State College, and The Wentz Gallery. Last year, Ping Khaw’s work hung in Salem’s Bush Barn Gallery and in Warren’s Columbia Center.