

'SPACES TO GROW, SPACES TO PROTECT' CULTURAL PLACE-MAKERS EVENT SET FOR FAR EAST LOUNGE

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Art & Design, Film & TV, Life & Arts

Visual Communications — the nation's premier Asian Pacific American media arts organization — will present a special panel of arts educators, activists, and curators and their role in nurturing and supporting community artists as part of the new Sustainable Little Tokyo series "ART4FSN" on Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 7 p.m. in Little Tokyo.

The special program at the Far East Lounge, "Spaces to Grow, Spaces to Protect: An Arts and Community Conversation with Place-Makers," presents a complement of leaders of locally based arts organizations that engage with members of culturally underserved neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles to encourage creation, activism, and social change.

From Boyle Heights to the Crenshaw District, and from Little Tokyo to Chinatown, "Spaces to Grow, Spaces to Protect" will seek to investigate the ways in which arts and activism spans the wide range of issues that impact communities of color throughout greater Los Angeles and beyond.

"Without a space through which to nurture, incubate, and celebrate our community's artists, a community for artists of color cannot grow and add much-welcome dimension to the long-cherished goal of cultural plurality," remarked Abraham Ferrer, Visual Communications staff member. "Yet the need for 'space' — regardless of a physical or online one — to create and present stands in increasingly sharp relief compared to equally needed institutions that are in short supply in our communities, whether it be a grocery store, a bank, a low-cost public health facility, low-income housing, and other establishments that give Angelenos dignity and enfranchisement in our society.

"We're thrilled to join with our friends and colleagues at Sustainable Little Tokyo's Arts Action Committee, as well as with our friends and colleagues of neighboring arts organizations, to celebrate the importance and value of cultural 'place-making' and to affirm our collective role as 'change-agents' of cultural plurality throughout Los Angeles and beyond."

The panelists comprise a broad range of curatorial, institutional, and community-based organizations:

- **Betty Avila** grew up in the northeast Los Angeles neighborhood of Cypress Park. Her work has centered on the intersection of the arts and social justice, with particular focus on community-building, public space, and youth empowerment. She has held positions with the Getty Research Institute, The Music Center and Levitt Pavilion.

In 2015, Avila joined the leadership of Self Help Graphics & Art, an organization with a 46-year, nationally recognized artistic legacy of empowering the Chicana/o and LatinX communities of Los Angeles through the arts. She sits on the boards of the Center for Cultural Innovation and Arts for L.A. In 2017, she was named one of *C-Suite Quarterly Magazine's* NextGen 10 in Philanthropy, Arts and Culture and an Impact-Maker to Watch by City Impact Labs.

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• **Ben Caldwell**, a Los Angeles-based arts educator and independent filmmaker, studied filmmaking at UCLA at the same time as Charles Burnett, Julie Dash and Billy Woodberry, as part of a group of young artists who were to change African American independent filmmaking — a cultural phenomenon referred to as “The L.A. Rebellion.”

Caldwell’s work has been shown nationally and internationally, most recently at Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and the Tate Modern. HeCaldwell taught for 15 years at CalArts, where he was a major founding force in the CalArts Community Arts Partnership (CAP).

In the mid-1990s, Caldwell founded the KAOS Network, a community art/tech accelerator center dedicated to providing training on digital arts, media arts and multi-media, in the heart of Leimert Park in the Crenshaw District.

• **Sonia Mak**, an independent curator and museum professional, is one of the founding curators of the Chinese American Museum and Art Salon Chinatown. Active in the Los Angeles art and culture scene for over 20 years, she is currently the development manager at the Vincent Price Art Museum and curates art exhibitions with a focus on Asian American artists at Art Salon Chinatown, which she co-founded in 2018.

• **Nobuko Miyamoto** is a song/dance/theater-maker and artistic director of Great Leap, an arts organization that 40 years ago found a home and launching pad for arts projects at Senshin Buddhist Temple in South Central Los Angeles. She now co-produces FandangObon, an eco-arts fest at the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, using participatory dance and music to bring Mexican, Japanese, African and Muslim Americans into one circle.

• **Hipolito (Polo) Munoz** attended Queen of Angels High School Seminary, a preparatory high school nestled in the historic San Fernando Mission. After serving in the U.S. Navy, he attended CSU Long Beach, where he received a political science BA focused on international relations and a minor in Communications. He worked with Scholastic Book Fairs in developing the Latino school market in the Los Angeles area.

His first production, “Flamenco Dreams” (2003), was distributed through Universal/Vivendo in partnership with Miles Copeland’s CIA distribution company. He is the co-founding partner and producer at Open Perspective Media, which produced “L.A. Business Today,” a talk show distributed on PBS affiliate KLCS-TV. He is also publisher of the online magazines *Latino Weekly Review* and *Landscape Latino*.

Munoz serves as vice president of the board of the KLCS Education Foundation and also serves on the board of SEEFest Film Festival. He is the co-founder and chief creative officer of Creating Creators.

• **Steven Wong**, currently the curator at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, was the interim executive director and curator at the Chinese American Museum, where he developed and implemented both contemporary art and history exhibitions. Previously, he was the director of digital literacy initiatives at the Little Tokyo Service Center. He has lectured at UC Santa Barbara and was an adjunct professor at Ventura College and Pasadena City College.

“‘Space to Grow, Spaces to Protect’ provides a fitting kick-off to our reconfigured slate of place-based arts action in Little Tokyo,” said Scott Oshima, lead community organizer at the JACCC and chair of SLT’s Arts Action Committee. “The new series, ART4FSN, is an eclectic slate of programs and events that offer a sustained, impactful lead-up to the 2020 City Council election, and our continued fight for First Street North — a block critical to the past, present, and future of Little Tokyo.

“We are excited to partner with Visual Communications to welcome colleagues, visitors, and Little Tokyo community stakeholders to celebrate and affirm our place here in our communities, through the broad range of our artistic expressions.”

“Spaces to Grow, Spaces to Protect” is presented by VC as part of the series “ART4FSN,” organized by the Sustainable Little Tokyo Arts Action Committee and slated for select Tuesdays, now through November 2020 at various venues throughout Little Tokyo.

The Far East Lounge is located at 353 E. First St. Parking is available at City Lot 7 (entrance adjacent to 120 Judge John Aiso St.) or the Aiso Street Lot at 101 N. Judge John Aiso St. (<http://parkinginla.lacity.org>). For more information on the "ART4FSN" series, visit: <http://sustainablelittletokyo.org/art4fsn>

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