



ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

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ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE ANNOUNCES EXPANDED LEADERSHIP TEAM TO STEER ORGANIZATION THROUGH FACILITIES TRANSITION

(November 26, 2007, Philadelphia, PA) The Asian Arts Initiative is pleased to announce new leadership at the Board and staff levels to help guide the organization as it is relocated due to the Pennsylvania Convention Center expansion, and prepares to transition in the spring to its future home at 1219 Vine Street in Chinatown. Eva Ray, Education Director at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), a scholar of Indian art, and an Asian Arts Initiative Board member for nearly a decade, has taken the helm as the organization's new Board Chair. Mytili Jagannathan, poet and 2002 Pew Fellow who served as the most recent Board Chair, has now joined the Initiative staff as the interim Director of Development. In their new roles, both women will continue to work closely with the Asian Arts Initiative's founder and Executive Director, Gayle Isa, and the current Board and staff of the organization.

After a decade in the Gilbert Building at 1315 Cherry Street, the Asian Arts Initiative had to relocate to temporary quarters in June because the Gilbert Building was slated for demolition as part of the \$700M expansion of the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In response, the Asian Arts Initiative decided to develop a new home that would house its own programs as well as other artists and arts organizations. Anchored at 12th and Vine Streets, the Asian Arts Initiative's new multi-tenant arts facility will offer opportunities for creating and viewing art, and exchanging ideas and dialogue between and among individual artists, arts organizations, local neighborhood residents, and the greater Philadelphia community. Incorporating individual artist studios and office and program space—including room for workshops and meetings, gallery and exhibition areas, and a black box-style theater—the facility will serve as a "lab" exploring the intersections of contemporary art-making and community building, and furthering the vision of Philadelphia as a vibrant and creative city.

“I see the arts as a way of speaking the truth—genuinely reflecting our society, and also a potent instrument in challenging and changing it,” Board Chair Eva Ray said. “I was drawn to the Asian Arts Initiative by the space it creates for art that engages with community conversations and social issues. The programmatic initiatives we've undertaken over the years have really put us on the map—both within Philadelphia and as part of a broader national network in our field. Now, we're in a moment where we're turning an unexpected challenge—the loss of our former home in the Gilbert Building—into a remarkable opportunity to develop a new home that will better serve youth and artists from Asian American communities, as well as open new doors to creative collaboration. I am pleased to step up as a leader of the Board as we embark on this exciting and

ambitious new phase.” Eva has worked at PHS in management positions for twenty years, and has been Director of Educational Programs for eight years; prior to her time at PHS, Eva worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She was trained as an art historian at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, specializing in the art of fifth century India. She has also been a major player in organizing several exhibitions of Indian art in the Philadelphia region.

Incoming interim Development Director Mytili Jagannathan has maintained an evolving relationship with the Asian Arts Initiative over the years—as a writer, occasional performance curator, staff member from 2000-2002, and most recently as Board Chair from September 2005-September 2007. “Over the past two years, we were really grappling with how best to respond to this forced relocation in a way that would ensure that the Asian Arts Initiative could continue to thrive as a vital resource for our community,” noted Mytili. “Now that our new facility is identified and preliminary renovations are underway, I felt I could be useful by putting my development skills to use in a more hands-on way.” Mytili brings experience as a fundraising and strategic planning consultant to nonprofits at the firm of Fairmount Ventures; and marketing/communications experience from positions at the architectural firm of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates and at the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The creation of the Asian Arts Initiative’s Development Director position was made possible in part by a grant from the Philadelphia Cultural Management Initiative, a program funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by Drexel University.

Said Gayle Isa, the Asian Arts Initiative’s Executive Director, “This is a wonderful example of one of the strengths of the Asian Arts Initiative: the ability to continue to keep people involved even as their roles change. I’m thrilled to be working with Eva and Mytili in their new capacities; I know that they will strengthen the leadership base for the Asian Arts Initiative and help guide our journey toward our new home.”

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The Asian Arts Initiative is a community arts center grounded in the belief that the arts can provide an important political and cultural voice for the Asian American community in Philadelphia. The Asian Arts Initiative sponsors theater, video-making, and visual arts workshops for youth and adult artists; opportunities for Asian American artists to develop new work; and performances and projects such as the *Chinatown In/Flux* visual art exhibition that was seen by 120,000 residents and visitors in 2006, and the *Chinatown Live(s)* book chronicling oral histories of diverse workers in the neighborhood. For more information, contact info@asianartsinitiative.org.

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