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Museum: Photography Exhibit Examines Asian-American Stereotypes

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Photographer Corky Lee has a long list of things he wants people to learn about Chinatown through his photographs and others - but they can sort of be summed up this way:

"Chinatown isn't just a cheap place to eat," Lee said. "There's a lots more to Chinatown than meets the eye."

Lee has organized a photography exhibit called, "Not Your Chop Suey Chinatown," at the Asian American Arts Centre in Chinatown. The exhibit is a tongue-in-cheek reference to America's sometime simplistic and stereotypical view of Chinese.

"We took upon this exhibit basically to dispel some of the myths and stereotypes about Chinatown," Lee said. "I asked people who are familiar with the community to photograph Chinatown in their own eyes."

People like Botumroath Keo Lebnun, a Cambodian-American who met her subject when she needed a heel fixed.

"He's just a shoe repair guy, but if you go to his house and you look at photographs of his life in China, he owns his own beautiful four-story house where all his kids lived in there," Keo Lebnun said. "And he sends money back from America."

Chee Wang Ng was born and raised in Malaysia. His work is about Chinese identity.

"This series is entitled, 'Eaten Your Fill of Rice?', and this is pretty much very equivalent to, 'What's up, how are you?' Ng said, "For Chinese, instead of, 'How are you doing?' We say, 'Eaten Your Fill of Rice?' So using that as a title, it's pretty much about humanity, and about how are you doing. And in China right now, for Chinese everywhere, it's a global society, and we might all speak in different dialects or different languages but one thing we all still do is eat rice."

Growing up, photographer Julia Cowling's Chinese identity was often at odds with her Mom's.

"These photos are from a series call "Two Generations, One American," Cowling said. "And it's basically about my relationship with my mother. I'm first-born Chinese-American and my mother was an immigrant, so it's about juxtapositions and cultural clashes and mixed messages."

Exhibit Information: "Not Your Chop Suey Chinatown"

Now through January 17

Asian American Arts Centre

26 Bowery, third floor above McDonalds
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