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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE • THE DALTON GALLERY PRESENTS

VILLAGE WORKS: PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOMEN
IN CHINA'S YUNNAN PROVINCE

P H O T O G R A P H E R S

XIONG LIJUAN JIN JIFEN ZHOU MEIQIONG ZHU YUZHEN RUAN FUZHEN
RUAN CHUNLAN LI CANMEI YANG JUYING LI JICHUN LI GUIZHEN LI FAZHEN
LI PUZHAO LI YULAN LI YUNLIU LI PINGWEN LI QIONGFEN LI JUMEI CHEN LAUWU
FU GUIJU DONG FENGYING PANG MEIZHI ZHAO GUIYING TAO LILI WANG MEIXIANG
LIANG HONGZHI YU DONGXIAN ZHAO JUXIAN WAN FENLIAN JIN XIANGXIANG
GONG JUZHEN DAI YUZHEN GUO HUIFEN YONG ZHUYING LIANG CAIYING
LIU YAORYING JIE XIUMEI ZHAO QIAOYING DOU MEILAN MA HUALIU SHEN LIAN
DIAN MEIFEN FU QIONG WANG YUELIAN SUN MEIYING PU QIONG LU SHIYING
LI CUIZHEN SONG XIAOHUAN MIN XIAOMEI JIANG QIAODING NIYAGUAN ZHANG ZUOZHEN
DU LANFENG FAN ZHIXIAN WANG HONGFEN WANG XUEZHI
DONG ZHILAN FENG MINGFANG ZHANG LEIFEN TA SHUQIN BE LANYING LI JUFEN

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HALF THE SKY is a metaphorical phrase coined by Mao Zedong to refer to women, suggesting their equality with men, each gender supporting half the sky.

**VILLAGE WORKS:
PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOMEN
IN CHINA'S YUNNAN PROVINCE**

SEPTEMBER 21 - DECEMBER 9, 2001

**DALTON GALLERY
AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE**

THE DALTON GALLERY is pleased to host Village Works: Photographs by Women in China's Yunnan Province, an exhibition organized by the Davis Museum and Cultural Center of Wellesley College. As stated in the Wellesley College catalogue for the exhibit (1999) *Village Works* is

an exhibition of photographic images made in 1992-93 by women living in mountain villages in the counties of Chengjiang and Luliang in Yunnan, China. This "photovoice" project, conceived by Caroline Wang, formed part of the needs-assessment phase of a program in women's reproductive health and development supported by the Ford Foundation in collaboration with a consortium of U.S. and Chinese public health specialists and government and non-government officials.

The exhibition has been reconfigured for display in the multiple rooms of our gallery. Four major themes form the underlying fabric of the exhibition: family life, village and community, labor and production, and social transformation. The gallery is generally organized around these themes, though one will often notice overlap when moving from room to room. These photographs and the accompanying text elicit many interpretations. In the end, however, one is left standing before them, attracted by their power of spirit and hope—the feelings so clearly transmitted by the women who made them. The photographs remind us of the potential of the visual arts to communicate across cultural and political boundaries.

Terry S. McGehee

PROFESSOR OF ART
EXHIBITION PROJECT DIRECTOR
AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 21, 2001





VILLAGE WORKS AT AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE'S introduction to the photographs of Chinese women from Yunnan Province came in the summer of 1997. A delegation of faculty visited the Ford Foundation's Beijing office as part of a study tour of Korea and China. Our overall purpose was to learn more about women's issues and women's studies in these two rapidly changing Asian societies. At the Ford Foundation office Tony Saich, director of the China program, briefed us on their work on rural women's reproductive health and gave us copies of *Visual Voices: 100 Photographs of Village China by the Women of Yunnan Province* (1995), a published selection of photographs of daily life taken by Chinese rural women. Carrying out research supported by the Ford Foundation, Caroline Wang of the University of Michigan had used a concept called "photovoice" in which subjects photograph their own lives; the resulting images stimulate discussion of community concerns and can be used to initiate and guide change.

Captivated by the photographs and the photovoice concept, we shared them with others at Agnes Scott when we returned and asked Terry McGehee, professor of art, to pursue the possibility of an exhibition on our campus. At that time Professor McGehee learned that Wang was collaborating with Wellesley College's Davis Museum and Cultural Center

and the Ford Foundation on just such a project. Several of us visited *Village Works* at Wellesley College in 1999 and arranged that the same exhibit be shown at Agnes Scott College in the fall of 2001.

The Village Works exhibit, prepared by Wellesley College, explores the substantive and artistic issues related to this photographic display. The roles of artist, subject, and viewer are complex when translated into an American gallery context. As Lucy Flint-Gohlke and Corinne Fryhle, curators of the Wellesley exhibit, note, these photographs become many different things to the viewer:

a pseudo-ethnographic glimpse into a seldom recorded region of the world; creative texts to be submitted to critical analysis and deconstruction; a promotional demonstration of an unconventional method for social and political activism; documents of social behavior seen through a gender-conscious lens; works of photojournalism and art.

In other words, the photograph as object, as interesting picture, is only one aspect of this exhibit. The artist, in this case the rural Chinese woman photographer, is intimately connected with her photographs, each of which she saw as depicting an important aspect of her life. Each photograph includes a caption, the woman's "voice," that explains her view of her subject matter. As you read the captions and study the photographs, you will first observe and then

begin to feel the intimacy of the connection between photograph and photographer. A new reading of the photograph emerges. This exhibit also asks us—the viewers, the visitors—to examine our own role as voyeurs, to look and listen for new ways of asking questions and understanding the realities of women's lives in rural China and in developing societies everywhere.

The photovoice project was started by Caroline Wang, Mary Ann Burris, and the Ford Foundation to involve rural women in identifying practical needs in their lives in order to improve their reproductive health and development. The essay that follows by Professor Feng Xu of Agnes Scott College discusses the lives of rural women in China, the background of this project, the rationale for the photovoice approach, and the changes that these photographs set in motion. As she notes, these photos were taken almost ten years ago; since that time conditions in Yunnan have improved dramatically. We had hoped to include updated photos from Chengjiang and Luliang counties and regret that circumstances in China prevented us from doing so.

Our acknowledgements must begin with the women of Yunnan Province who had the courage to step forward and speak eloquently—through image and voice—of the

joys and problems of their daily lives. We also want to extend our thanks to Wu Kunyi of the Yunnan provincial government, who directed the implementation of the project in China. Caroline Wang, the original photovoice project director, assisted us as we began to explore acquiring this exhibit. The curators of the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College, Lucy Flint-Gohlke and Corinne Fryhle, were most enthusiastic guides and encouraged our endeavor. John Rossetti, preparator of the Davis Museum, was extremely generous with his time and logistical advice. Donna Sadler, chair of the Agnes Scott art department, aided with the initial research and with programming. Joan Kaufman, Ford Foundation Program Officer for reproductive health in China, during the later stages of the Yunnan project, helped us finalize arrangements. Special thanks go to Terry McGehee, who directed the project and curated the exhibit for the Dalton Gallery, and to Amy Parry, who assisted her. The intellectual efforts of Feng Xu made the realization of this exhibit possible. Christine Cozzens, chair of the Millennium Events committee at the College, provided invaluable

guidance in planning special cultural and intellectual programs to complement the exhibit and in producing this catalogue. Demetrice Parks, Anne Beidler, and Jennifer Lund turned plans into reality as the project took shape on our campus. We would like to acknowledge the time and dedication of the students who worked on the project: Christina Johnson '02, Leah Owenby '01, and Yuan Mei '04. For funding that enabled us to bring the exhibit to Agnes Scott, we are grateful to Mrs. Frances Shillinglaw, who made the first contribution. Additional funds were provided by the Millennium Events program, the Mary Wallace Kirk Fund, and Agnes Scott College.

We hope that visitors to the *Village Works* exhibition will spend time with these photographs and the supplementary materials, view the documentary film on modern life in a town in the Yunnan Province: *China: Beyond the Clouds*, and take away a deeper understanding and respect for rural women in China and in other parts of the globe.

Mary Brown Bullock '66

PRESIDENT, AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE





SEEING THEIR WAY FORWARD

IN THESE PHOTOS from Chengjiang and Luliang counties, Yunnan Province, China, one dominant theme captures our eye: hard-working women. The women in these photos certainly "hold up half of the sky," as Mao Zedong said—or perhaps more. Hauling water, watching children, cooking, feeding pigs, washing clothes, planting and harvesting. . . . Did women's participation in production lead to their liberation and empowerment, as Mao once claimed it would? One wonders whether these women have any time to look after themselves and what impact their heavy workload has on their health and development. As a program liaison officer from the Ford Foundation said, "Their own health is not their priority; even when a woman is sick, she feels she can't leave her work and children."

But look again. You are also looking at the women who made the photos, along with their relatives and friends. They are the ones who first looked through the camera. Their vision captured the scenes, and their voices explained them to program officers afterward. It was the first time most of these women had used a camera. Clearly, when the Ford Foundation and its Chinese partners created this opportunity, these rural women had plenty to say.

Then consider: these photos were taken almost ten years ago and not just for exhibit abroad. These photos also launched the start of the Ford

Foundation's Yunnan Province Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program. With the proud photographers present, the exhibit opened first in their own home counties. Local officials came to look, their presence sending an important signal about the project's significance to the government.

What can we learn from these photos? First, they portray specific women in a unique situation. China's economy has slowed down somewhat in recent years from the frantic pace of the nineties but is still one of the most dynamic economies in the world. Beijing and the coastal cities now offer many of the comforts of middle- and high-income nations. Modern skyscrapers seem to sprout almost daily in these bustling urban landscapes. But many of the western and interior provinces, while also undergoing their own transformations, remain far behind the big coastal cities in economic prosperity and growth. Yunnan Province, on the border with Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma), is one of the poorest of those provinces.

Poor women in wealthy coastal provinces such as Jiangsu Province face quite different situations from those faced by the women of Yunnan, both in their relation to the men in their lives and in relation to the local economy. Solutions and policies that work for one group of women will not necessarily work for another group; it is

probably the women in each situation who best understand what is needed. And just because Yunnan is a poorer province does not mean that the position of these women is worse than that of the women in Jiangsu.

This is why Ford Foundation program officials sought the Yunnan women's perspective: generalizations can result in mistakes. Their "woman-centered" development model provided insight about the particular circumstances and needs in Yunnan. Through these photos, program officials saw in a concrete way how the combination of poverty, inadequate education, poor health, and punishing workloads affected these women's lives, particularly their reproductive health. Because of the interconnected nature of the factors affecting women's reproductive health, the program adopted multisectoral participation and a multidisciplinary approach. On paper, these projects appear as so many items on a list, and their interconnections are less apparent. In practical terms, the projects were deeply, deliberately intertwined.

The Ford Foundation's Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program served as "a springboard for a participatory planning process, to encourage local initiative and involvement, strengthen institutional planning, and bridge bureaucratic divides." This mandate reflected a philosophy of development that con-





siders intersectoral collaboration essential to the success of such local development projects. But intersectoral collaboration implies inter-agency collaboration, which conflicts with long-established Chinese administrative structures that work from the top down. Provincial level agencies oversee agencies at the county level, which oversee the township, and so on. But the local public health clinic may have no dealings with the local poverty alleviation bureau, even on health questions specifically affecting the poor. Consequently, in China, a program of this scale and complexity generally requires both the resources and sophistication of a large organization like the Ford Foundation and a special degree of political will from the Chinese partner agencies. In Yunnan, the Chinese agencies were involved at both the provincial and county levels and included the public health bureaus, family planning committees, local Women's Federations, education committees, poverty alleviation committees, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, and Kunming Medical College. The intersectoral work style and "bottom-up participatory planning" enabled women to express their needs and wishes through multiple channels. And the process of building an intersectoral collaboration "has also been extremely helpful to us as managers," said Wu Kunyi, former director of Yunnan's family planning and health bureaus and director of the program's Guidance Group.

Chinese and Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program officials worked together to develop projects to lighten women's workloads, including the piping of water from mountain wells, the building of biogas tanks, latrine and silage pit construction, energy-efficient stove renovations, the provision of hoppers for pig feed, mechanized turnip shredders, and the organization of childcare groups.

The point of doing all this was to free time for the women to attend recently established literacy, nutrition, and cooking classes. The literacy programs, while valuable in their own right, had a practical focus that reinforced other learning goals of the project. Chengjiang County's Women's Federation met with collaborating agencies—including the public health bureau, education bureau, and veterinary station—in order to include practical agricultural and health information with specific application to the local area. Health worker training classes taught local midwives to provide prenatal check-ups and safe, convenient delivery services. Serving their local community in this way was an additional source of pride for the trainees. The Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program also provided health education to increase the women's awareness of their own reproductive health needs and to facilitate the diagnosis of untreated repro-

ductive diseases such as gynecological infections. The participation of men in these programs was encouraged as a necessary component in reproductive health.

What now, ten years later? Reviewing materials from the Ford Foundation's Beijing office, we know that the program has now completed its last stage, but our own attempts to arrange a follow-up visit dissolved unexpectedly this summer. This disappointing outcome is a reminder of the logistical difficulties involved when dealing with a distant region across political and cultural divides. These challenges make the Ford Foundation program's achievements that much more impressive.

For now, however, we are left with only the testimony of these photos—reminders of the daunting, interconnected challenges that many women face in this world. But they are also reminders of the power of women to inspire cooperation and to direct change in their own lives. With groundbreaking methodology, the Ford Foundation program set precedents for development work. May its legacy endure, both in China and in the United States.

Feng Xu

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE





FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS FROM DAMOGU TOWNSHIP

I AM A TYPICAL RURAL WOMAN. I attended our village school, set up after liberation, and then finished my primary and junior middle school in our country township. Eventually, I graduated from the middle normal school in the county. My school was in a mountainous village called Xiaobaiji near my home village. Some of my classmates became doctors, some became industrial workers. I took teaching as my profession, because I have a strong desire to improve the educational level of my fellow villagers, and education is the only way to narrow the gap between village and city. We should take the first step within our own families. I have been a participant from the very beginning in the Women's Reproductive Health and Development Program. The most remarkable feeling I have had from the project is that of international unity. Women from every life station are cooperating with the ideals of unity, equality and development.

I would like to take this opportunity to give other women in poor mountainous villages some sincere advice. We could not choose our parents and birthplace, we could not choose our sex, but we can come to know ourselves and struggle to overcome our difficulties. We are confident that we can continue to work for equality, peace, development and happiness.

Ruan Chunlan

DEPUTY MAYOR OF DAMOGU TOWNSHIP,

YUNNAN, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

PHOTOVOICE PROJECT PARTICIPANT

VILLAGE WORKS CATALOGUE
DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER
WELLESLEY COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 14, 1999

PHOTOVOICE

BEFORE SHE DIED IN 1992, the photographer and educator Jo Spence published a book, *What Can a Woman Do with a Camera?* I came across Spence's work in 1995, three years after many Chinese counterparts and I provided sixty-two Yunnan farmers with cameras so that they could take pictures, tell stories, and reach policy makers who govern their lives. In her title, Spence poses a question that fittingly introduces the photovoice concept and methodology used by these farmers.

The theoretical underpinnings of photovoice are health promotion principles relating to community organization and communication; the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness and feminist theory; and a grassroots approach to documentary photography.

Photovoice embraces the basic principles that images teach, pictures can influence policy, and community people ought to create the images and text that inspire healthful public policy. It is a process facilitated through a series of workshops in which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. The participants are first familiarized with underlying issues surrounding the use of cameras, power and ethics, and introduced to the photovoice concept and method. Participants then meet regularly to discuss their photographs, and to codify the issues, themes or theories that arise from them. Finally, they share their recommendations and insights with policy

makers, journalists and the broader community through public forums and venues that include newspaper spreads, exhibitions and slide shows.

Village Works: Photographs by Women in China's Yunnan Province is about the lives of farmers, and how they used their photographs and stories as a tool for policy change. Through their images and group discussions, these farmers voiced the need for specific changes in their townships and counties. As a result of the farmers' advocacy and participation, new programs and policies arose, including cooperative-style day care for children, midwifery training for indigenous women, need-blind scholarships for girls, health literacy for adults, biogas tanks for families, solar baths, and pig raising for income generation.

The people who participate in photovoice projects typically find themselves labeled "hard-to-reach," "underserved" or "disadvantaged." They tend to be among society's busiest people: they are low-income; they may be homeless or unemployed, or they may hold several jobs; they raise children; they cope with inordinate stigma; they are accorded the lowest status by the society and the community in which they live. Their lives are fraught with burden.

While describing to western activists and academics how the Yunnan women helped to create social change through their images and text, I have been asked thoughtful questions: What layers of repre-

sentation occur in this process? How was the support of policy makers brokered, and how did policy and program recommendations arise from all the stories and images? The process of excavating these and many other questions led me in 1994 to codify this photovoice concept and methodology. This exhibition therefore maps not only the farmers' village homeland, but also a method that homeless adults in Ann Arbor, neighborhood residents in northern California, people with mental illness in New Haven, and young people and policy makers in Flint have used to create programs and influence policies that matter to themselves and their community.

The photographic works of these farmers exceeded their own expectations as well as those of hundreds of cadres from the provincial, county and township organizations that facilitated this Ford Foundation-supported project. These farmers, who are also village mothers and daughters, are rarely seen and heard, despite their extraordinary contribution to the labor force. As this exhibition bears witness, the village works.

Caroline Wang

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PHOTOVOICE PROJECT DIRECTOR AND

EXHIBITION CO-ORGANIZER.

VILLAGE WORKS CATALOGUE
DAVIS MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER
WELLESLEY COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 14, 1999





VILLAGE WORKS: A TEMPLATE FOR CHANGE

THE FORD FOUNDATION'S reproductive health program in China is in many ways symbolized by the process that led to the wonderful photos. When the Foundation decided to begin a reproductive health program in China in the early 1990's, my predecessor, Mary Ann Burris, thought long and hard about how to go about it. The Ford Foundation's mission statement emphasizes that the people closest to the problems should be involved in finding solutions to those problems. The Foundation promotes participatory, community-based efforts in problem solving. Mary Ann knew that solid health data was needed for helping to focus on the problems of greatest need and brought in China's pre-eminent health researchers from Beijing and Yunnan to carry out a survey of 8000 rural women. But in a stroke of genius and courage, she also fought hard for a complementary exercise, which brought the insights of rural women into the planning process. The idea was resisted by many local people who thought the rural women too stupid to take photos and by decision makers on both sides of the Pacific. But the project went forward under the capable stewardship of Yang Kelin and Caroline Wang and set the course for Ford's reproductive health program in Yunnan and elsewhere in China

where needs and solutions are identified from the bottom up, not the top down.

Had the money gone to the Yunnan health bureau without the photo project, a very different approach would have resulted, probably focused only on health education, training, and treatment for common reproductive health problems. But the photos revealed a very different picture of rural women's ill health: their high rural labor burden, what they called "light work," of backbreaking tasks for eight hours or more each day hauling water and firewood, preparing pig food, all with little help from men. With no daycare facilities, women carried their infants and children with them to these tasks and to the fields for farming, exposing them to many dangers. Poor hygiene leading to reproductive tract infections was due as much to difficult access to clean water for bathing as to poor health knowledge. No amount of health education would make a woman use water she had hauled for hours for a bath instead of for cooking or for washing clothes.

The interrelationships of poverty, poor education, and health were obvious. Women's low social status was a key contributor. The steps needed to address the problems were not merely the work of one sector, but of many. An intersectoral guidance group was formed made up of representatives of health, family

planning, the poverty alleviation bureau, the education commission, the Women's Federation, and other related agencies. This type of intersectoral collaboration is rare in China, and the project set a precedent that has become a model for the province. Each agency represented in the group was responsible for different components of the project needed to address the multifaceted problems revealed by the photos.

The poverty alleviation bureau was responsible for addressing the labor burden issues by providing biogas stoves for each household, building cisterns and piping water from mountain wells, introducing silage pit techniques which reduced the amount of time needed to prepare pig food. Solar showers were constructed in the villages. Electric turnip shredders provided to speed up and mechanize the arduous task of preparing dried turnips for the export market. The Women's Federation concentrated on a practical literacy program, on income generation activities, and on nutrition and cooking classes. They also constructed and staffed day care centers in the project villages. The health bureau concentrated on training health workers, developing health education and initiating diagnosis and treatment programs for the huge problem of untreated gynecological infections, a silent burden borne by local women too embarrassed to seek care.



This work began in 1992 and has continued through several stages of project cycles. Nine years later, the impact of this approach and these interventions is obvious. There has been a sea change in local attitudes and commitment to improvement in reproductive health. While the basic nature of women's income earning work remains unchanged, much of the backbreaking labor in the project villages has been eliminated. The women have gained new respect in the villages because of the popularity of the photographs and the book. Problems such as gynecological infections and delivery complications have been greatly reduced through advocacy, awareness raising, and other interventions. The biogas and solar showers are so popular that the county and townships have contributed their own funds to extend them to other villages in the project townships. And the model of intersectoral planning has been widely publicized by the provincial leadership as the most appropriate way to address the multifaceted causes of poor reproductive health.

In sum, the poverty, problems and labor burden revealed by the photos of the early 1990s have to a great extent been addressed in the project villages. But more importantly, a model for extending these improvements to other needy villages has been developed and promoted

within the Province and is now "owned" by the province.

Finally, on a personal note, I came to this project in 1996 as a public health practitioner with a very clear view of the public health interventions needed to deal with the reproductive health problems facing these women. I emerged from my years of shepherding this project transformed: for me this program has confirmed that poverty and gender inequity are the major determinants of ill health for women in China and elsewhere, and solutions to these problems must start with a clear analysis of these root causes and with interventions to address them.

Joan Kaufman

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

(FORMER FORD FOUNDATION PROGRAM OFFICER
FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, CHINA)

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

THE DALTON GALLERY

gallery hours:

M-F 10-4:30pm, S-S 12-4pm

gallery closed: October 18-21; November 21-25

141 E. College Avenue
Atlanta/Decatur,
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RELATED CULTURAL EVENTS

LECTURE

Oct. 1 3:00 p.m.

Representing Women In China: What's Gender Got To Do With It
Dr. Steve Goldberg
Associate Professor of Asian Art History, Hamilton College
Room 101, Dana Fine Arts Building

FILMS

Beginning **September 22**, each Saturday and Sunday throughout the fall*
China: Beyond the Clouds, a documentary film produced by the National Geographic Society on modern life in the city of Lijiang in Yunnan Province (1992)
Dalton Gallery, Dana Fine Arts Building
(Film begins at noon and ends at 4:00 p.m.)

Oct. 11 7:00 and 9:00 p.m.

The Story of Qiu Ju, by Zhang Yimou with Gong Li (1994)
This film examines a country woman's quest for justice after a village cadre injures her husband.
Alston Campus Center, The Hub

Nov. 8 7:00 and 9:00 p.m.

Ermo, by Zhou Xiaowen (1995)
The heart of this film is a village woman's sortie into individual capitalism, which mirror's China's expanding experience with capitalism.
Alston Campus Center, The Hub

Nov. 29 7:00 and 9:00 p.m.

Not One Less, by Zhang Yimou (1999)
This comedy — played by real people, not actors — tells the story of a village school and a young girl's struggle to fill-in as substitute teacher.
Alston Campus Center, The Hub

DANCE

October 12 and 13 Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company
Presser, 8 p.m.

*GALLERY CLOSED OCTOBER 18-21 AND NOVEMBER 21-25