

Asian Arts Initiative
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NEWS ADVISORY

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The Asian Arts Initiative offers
a MASALA MELA (Festival of Rich Diversity)
through our Spring '99 Rap Series!

The Rap Series at the Asian Arts Initiative continues in its second year with it's mission to inspire dialogue among Asian American community members and artists. The Rap Series is a monthly program that features a mix of dance, performance art, poetry, film and video. Rap Series events are held at the Asian Arts Initiative at 1315 Cherry Street, 2nd Floor in Philadelphia.

"Masala Mela" a term which we are using to mean Festival of Rich Diversity, appropriately conjures the vibrancy and variety of creativity showcased in the Rap Series. Watch for these upcoming events:

Friday, February 19

This Friday night's Rap Series program features a Masala of performers of South Asian descent addressing a variety of issues that are relevant to all Asian Americans. Artists include poet Chetana Jois; musicians Branavan Ganesan and Raji Malik from the local world fusion group Jaffna; and performance artists from New York's Peeling the Banana. Pieces will take a poignant and at times witty look at struggles and triumphs around family relationships, racial identity, and building community as first generation Americans. This program is co-sponsored by the Balch Institute in conjunction with their current exhibit *Live Like the Banyan Tree: Images from the Indian American Experience*.

Friday, March 19

The Asian Arts Initiative's popular *Women of Color, Women of Conscience* program returns with D.C. performance poet Lori Tsang. In collaboration with composer/saxophonist Antonio Parker, Lori wishes to connect isolated communities and challenge the boundaries of identity politics. Her poetry reflects on the impact of history, race, violence, displacement and colonialism on human relationships, identity, gender roles and family. Other artists TBA.

Friday, April 23

Writing From the Heart: Voices of Color features over a dozen participants in our spring creative writing class led by local artist Betsy Self. Class participants will engage in improvisational writing exercises and share personal experiences for the duration of the class. Their personal stories will be the focus of this Rap Series.

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Friday, May 21

Attention John Woo fans! *At One With the Other* highlights Hong Kong's John Woo with clips of his films interspersed with discussion facilitated by filmmaker Uma Magal. Uma will trace John Woo's use of Hong Kong and Hollywood conventions and how these forms relate to the content of his films, especially his exploration of identity and home.

Friday, June 18

Recontextualizing Traditions showcases the passion of diverse performers who are continuing Asian traditions as dynamic, contemporary, and relevant art forms. Pallabi Chakravorty, a dancer trained in the classical Indian Kathak tradition, will perform her original work "Silencing the Nautch". Through text, music, choreography, and video, Pallabi engages with the history of the "nautch dancers" who were the original bearers of Kathak dance. Her piece highlights the importance of situating classical Indian dance within India's history of colonialism and nationalism. Other artists TBA.

Friday, July 16

Art as Resistance to Violence invites you to witness Asian American women who are resisting societal violences of various kinds through critical and personal art-making. Writer Chaya Bhuvaneshwar will share a short story, "Penances", about domestic violence and sexual freedom. Video activist Grace Poore will present her documentary "Voices Heard Sisters Unseen" about groups of battered women who are frequently ignored by the media, social service agencies, shelters, and the criminal justice systems. Dancer Sharmila Desai will use yoga, capoeira, and Indian folk/tribal dance to reflect on the seemingly contradictory aspects of creation, preservation, and destruction embodied in Hindu Goddess Kali.

All performances begin at 8:00 p.m. and are followed by audience discussion. All performances are held at the Asian Arts Initiative at 1315 Cherry Street. Tickets are \$3 for members of the Asian Arts Initiative or \$5 for the general public. Advance tickets and reservations available at the Asian Arts Initiative (215)557-0455.

The Asian Arts Initiative believes that the arts can provide an important political and cultural “voice” for the Asian American communities. The Rap Series brings us closer to creating a community art center for artists and others in Philadelphia to engage in the arts as a means of expressing our experiences as Asian Americans.

The Rap Series is supported in part by a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Additional funding for the Asian Arts Initiative has been provided by the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, William Penn Foundation, Independence Foundation, Lawrence Saunders Fund, Philadelphia Foundation, Samuel Fels Fund, Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation, 1957 Charity Trust, and CoreStates Bank.

For more information about the Rap Series or the Asian Arts Initiative, please contact us at
(215)557-0455.

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