

Camille Gavin CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Expression of China, in art

Large exhibit opens tonight at Bakersfield Museum of Art

An exhibit of Chinese art that spans generations opens with a reception this evening at Bakersfield Museum of Art.

Titled "The Colors of China," it includes paintings, calligraphy and other artworks created by youth and adult artists from all over China. The styles range from traditional to contemporary. Local resident Jess Nieto was instrumental in bringing the exhibit here. Nieto, executive director of the Bakersfield-based Heritage of America Educational and Cultural Foundation, acted in response to a request from Jian Hu, a Beijing medical doctor and biochemist who serves on the Heritage board.

Nieto recalled that several years ago, Hu had talked to him about the possibility of showing such an exhibit in Bakersfield. "Jian said to me, 'This is just a wild dream of mine — can you find some way to make it happen?'"

A short time later, Nieto arranged for a representative from China to meet with Bernie Herman, director of the art museum, and Emily Falke, chief curator, and show them examples of the artwork. Apparently they liked what they saw and the exhibit was scheduled.

"This is a very rare exhibit," Nieto said. "To be able to use the visual and performing arts to create better understanding between cultures is very much in keeping with (Heritage's) mission."

Hu and several of the artists are expected to attend the reception. One of the artists will give a demonstration of calligraphy. "In Asia," Nieto said, "calligraphy has thousands of years of tradition."

Falke noted the exhibit is significant in that 2009 marks the 30th year of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. The adult artists are well known and some are even famous in their own country, she said. The child artists, ages 9 to 18, have had their work exhibited in major museums and all are winners of art competitions.

With a total of 120 pieces



More Camille: Read previews of 'Noche de Gala'



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAKERSFIELD MUSEUM OF ART

"Plum Picture" by Huang Chu Ya, 10, is in the traditional Chinese style and measures 27.5 inches by 26.7 inches. It was painted in 2008.

Art openings

What: Eye Gallery, "The Colors of China" and "Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead)"

When: Reception at 6 p.m. tonight

Where: Bakersfield Museum of Art, 1930 R St.

Admission: Free to museum members, \$10 nonmembers

Information: 323-7219

this is such a large collection that it requires a good deal of space. It will be placed in both the Cunningham and Dezember galleries as well as the museum's hallway. Another exhibit, "Dia de los Muertos — Day of the Dead," opens the same evening in another section of the museum.

Many artists and craftsmen have used the "Day of the Dead" as an inspiration. The skull, or calavera, and the

skeleton, or calacas, are the common symbols of this holiday and are reflected in all the works. Nieto, a former college professor whose heritage is Hispanic, will do the introduction.

Falke describes the exhibit as a colorful collection of paintings and sculpture of a holiday celebrated in Mexico and by Latinos and others living in the United States and Canada. The holiday focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember those who have died.

Prints by the late Jose Guadalupe Posada are a valuable part of the exhibit, which includes the work of about 25 artists from other parts of California and the southwestern U.S. Posada has been called Mexico's "most beloved and truly national artist."

In a more contemporary vein is German-born Dirk Hagner's wood carving that combines the Day of the Dead theme with the well-known San Diego County freeway sign that warns drivers to watch out for illegal immigrants attempting to cross the highway.

Also included in the show are a number of painted skulls done by local artists. Both exhibits will be on display