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'Xin Lu' will get you moving

By Shana Ting Lipton | May 2, 2008

Ming-Yuen S. Ma's work will be shown on a touring bus.
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'Xin Lu' at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival will get you moving

Ming-Yuen S. Ma's work will be shown on a touring bus.

By Shana Ting Lipton, Special to The Times
May 3, 2008

To call Los Angeles-based Chinese American experimental video artist Ming-Yuen S. Ma a man without a country might not be entirely accurate. The globe-trotting creator is, in fact, a man of several countries -- the United States, Britain and China, to be exact. It is this multicultural undercurrent, along with his personal and family memories of a bygone Hong Kong, that have inspired his media project and film series, "Xin Lu."

Consisting of four mostly short films, it will screen Saturday and Sunday as part of the 24th annual Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. Like some of the mobility themes it explores, the collection will, quite literally, move: It will be shown on a bus touring Los Angeles. "A screening room with wheels," Ma says.

Although born in Buffalo, N.Y., and educated at Columbia University and California Institute of the Arts, the media artist grew up in Hong Kong. The formerly British territory's hand-over to the Chinese in 1997, along with his mother's preemptive immigration to London in 1995, were catalysts for the series. "Xin Lu" consists primarily of a mix of personal home videos and other footage of cities and locales, as well as interviews and voice-overs.

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Ma began work on the first short film in the series, "Myth(s) of Creation," at the time of Hong Kong's hand-over. He followed with "Mother/Land" (2000), an exploration of the connection between identification with a homeland and a child's bond with his mother. He notes, ironically, that since his mother's move to Britain, "I go visit home in a place where I didn't grow up." "Movements East-West" (2003) was the next chapter. And, finally, 2007's "[OS]" explores Ma's own identity as a displaced gay man through interviews with other gay Chinese men of his generation who also grew up in Hong Kong but moved to such places as Vancouver and Toronto in Canada, and London and Washington, D.C.

In 1991, the artist created his nest in L.A., where he has entrenched himself in the fertile multimedia arts scene by coordinating the L.A. Freewaves Festival and UCLA's Electric Shadows: A Pan-Asian Film Festival, among other projects. The upcoming bus tour is the linchpin for

the locales he has visited and made his home -- London, France and now Silver Lake. "I want to link the content of the videos to local history and geography," he says.

Both three-to-five-hour bus tours will take film festival visitors from Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood to downtown L.A., as well as through Echo Park and Silver Lake. Beyond the films' mobile screenings, Ma has collaborated with other artists from diverse cultures to create a broader tour experience. Vietnamese chef Diep Tran is preparing international lunch boxes for passengers. Chinese American artist Kristina Wong, Iranian American artist Amitis Motevalli and the Chicano collective Pocho Research Society will help orchestrate performance art and discussions during the ride.

And, of course, Ma is, in his words, "curating the route," which consists of stops at Iranian-owned ice cream parlor Mashti Malone's in Hollywood and the Chinese American Museum at El Pueblo de Los Angeles.

"L.A. is the perfect place to initiate the project," he notes. "It's a Pacific Rim city, a fascinating but sometimes infuriating transnational place."

The 'Xin Lu' Video Bus Tour

Where: Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, Directors Guild of America, 7920 Sunset Blvd., L.A.

When: 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Price: \$25, includes lunch and beverages.

Info: (213) 680-4462, www.vconline.org/festival