



# ASIAN ARTS INITIATIVE

1219 VINE STREET \* PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107 \* (215) 557-0455



Pictured (L-R): *Yellow Claw* #1 (Atlas Comics, 1956);  
*Air War Stories* #6 (Dell Comics, 1966)

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High-resolution images available  
upon request and online at:  
[www.canarypromo.com/asianarts](http://www.canarypromo.com/asianarts)

Website: [www.asianartsinitiative.org](http://www.asianartsinitiative.org)

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## **Asian Arts Initiative explores the evolution of Asian images in U.S. comics with *Marvels & Monsters*, February 3 – March 23**

*Opening reception Friday, February 3, 6 – 8 p.m.*

PHILADELPHIA – Much more than a treasure trove for fans of graphic fiction, the exhibition ***Marvels & Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942-1986*** at **Asian Arts Initiative** offers a captivating look at America's evolving racial and cultural sensibility as it is perceived in comic books. ***Marvels & Monsters***, on view **February 3 through March 23**, draws from the unique collection of science fiction author and cultural studies scholar **William F. Wu**, whose assemblage of comic images is the world's largest of its kind.

"When I began this collection, it was because I realized that popular culture reaches virtually everyone," says Wu. "These iconic images — good and bad — have real-world effects on people's perceptions of themselves and those around them."

According to **Gayle Isa**, executive director of the Asian Arts Initiative, the exhibition not only looks back on the history of cultural representation, it also serves as a reminder that those representations can change, with awareness and proactivity. "*Marvels & Monsters* illustrates how images of Asian-Americans have influenced contemporary culture," says Isa. "It's exciting for the Asian Arts Initiative to bring this show to Philadelphia, as an opportunity for our community to reflect on the stories we want to tell and consider ways we can affect future perceptions."

Presented in collaboration with New York University's Asian/Pacific/American Institute and Fales Library & Special Collections and curated by *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist **Jeff Yang**, *Marvels & Monsters*

covers more than four decades of imagery and draws from some of the most turbulent times in our nation's history. The exhibition visually tracks an ever-morphing portrayal of Asians in comic books, which began as racist and xenophobic propaganda during times of war and have coalesced into archetypes that, in many ways, still define America's perception of Asians today.

*Marvels & Monsters* takes the most potent and indelible examples of such images from the thousands in Wu's vast collection, and organizes them around the archetypes they reflect — the Alien, the Kamikaze, the Brute, the Lotus Blossom, the Guru, the Brain, the Temptress, the Manipulator — while placing them within a historical context.

Juxtaposing these images, *Marvels & Monsters* will display a library of present-day graphic novels by Asian-Americans — including **Ken Chen, V.V. Ganeshanathan, Larry Hama, David Henry Hwang, Naomi Hirahara, Genny Lim, Greg Pak, Vijay Prashad** and **Gene Luen Yang** — whose influx into the industry has begun to transform how Asians are drawn and depicted.

“The images gathered here may be disturbing, even shocking, coming as they do from a genre most associated with young readers,” says Yang, the exhibition's curator. “But that's intentional: These images are our Rogues' Gallery, our own Legion of Doom — these are the supervillains we face in our individual and collective quest for truth, justice and the Asian-American way.”

*Marvels & Monsters* will also feature elements designed to encourage direct engagement with the archetypes, including life-size cutouts that allow visitors to put themselves inside the image. In addition, the installation **Shades of Yellow** matches the hues used for comic-book Asian skin tones with their garish Pantone™ color-chip equivalents.

## **Schedule of Programs and Events**

**Friday, February 3, 6 – 8 p.m., FREE**

*Exhibition Opening Reception*

**Friday, February 17, 7:30 – 9:30 p.m., \$5-\$10 (sliding scale)**

*Family Style Open Mic featuring Larry Hama*

Kicking off this spring's monthly open mic series, the Asian Arts Initiative invites veteran comic artist **Larry Hama** to talk about his career in comics. Hama's works include *X-Men/Wolverine*, *G.I. Joe/A Real American Hero*, *Spooks* and *Island of Terror/Battle of Iwo Jima*. Hama has been featured as a guest speaker at the University of Southern California, Parsons School of Design, School of Visual Arts, Moscow Film Institute, the English School in Berlin and the Los Angeles Film School.

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, February 28, March 1, 6 and 8;**

**Culminating Comics Party, Friday, March 16**

*“Character Development” Intensive Workshop Series (grades 7-12)*

**\*\*Space is limited; RSVP required at 215-557-0455**

Through a series of four comics workshops with local comic artist **Rocky Kev**, young people will work on creating their own three-page comic that explores identity and self-perception. Students will create their own personal character and develop a story around him/her; the stories created by participants will be bound together as an anthology, and a copy will be given to all participants.

**Thursday, March 1, 6 p.m., FREE**

*Film Screening and Panel Discussion*

Join Philadelphia-area scholars of Asian-American Studies to discuss the themes from the exhibition, as well as how their own research explores the connection between formulations of Asian-American identity and popular media today.

Panelists include: **Josephine Park**, professor of English literature and director of the Asian American Studies department, University of Pennsylvania; **David Eng**, professor of English literature and Asian American Studies, University of Pennsylvania; **Theresa Tensuan**, professor of English literature and director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Haverford College; and **Bakirathi Mani**, associate professor of English literature, Swarthmore College.

Asian Arts Initiative is located at 1219 Vine St., Philadelphia, PA.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Friday, 12 – 6 p.m.

Admission: Free

Information: [asianartsinitiative.org](http://asianartsinitiative.org) or 215-557-0455

**About the Asian Arts Initiative**

Asian Arts Initiative is a community-based arts center in Philadelphia that engages artists and everyday people to create art that explores the diverse experiences of Asian-Americans, addresses our social context, and imagines and effects positive community change. Recently relocated due to the expansion of the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Asian Arts Initiative is now in a new home at 1219 Vine Street, where we are contributing to the revitalization of Vine Street and Chinatown North. For more information, please call 215-557-0455 or visit [www.asianartsinitiative.org](http://www.asianartsinitiative.org).

**About *Marvels & Monsters***

*Marvels & Monsters* has been supported in part by the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, the Federal-State Partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of the Arts.

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**To request photos, interviews and more information, please contact:**

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