

March 9, 2021

Dear Godzilla,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) is cancelling the exhibition *Godzilla vs. The Art World: 1990-2001*, originally slated to open in Spring 2021 at MOCA. After nineteen participants out of thirty-three artists withdrew from the exhibition on Friday, March 5, it was clear that the efforts and intentions of the remaining artists and the MOCA team to keep the exhibition alive would be for naught.

I am reflecting on how this project began, with a 2018 Godzilla reunion at MOCA to lay the groundwork for collaboration. Through getting to know all of you and your work, I learned that there is not just one singular idea of 'Godzilla.' Artists joined and remained involved in Godzilla for different reasons: political activism, critical discourse; a sense of community, and for their work to be seen and taken seriously. The group's diversity was its strength. Therefore, writing to all of you now as a collective, I must acknowledge the singular voices, perspectives, feelings, and work that make up Godzilla, then and now.

As a young artist, I played a small part on the committee to organize Godzilla's final project, *Why Asia?* What I learned from that experience, and what I admired about your collaborative work, was the individual will and productive energy it takes to manifest a collective spirit. Artists followed through on the daily work of organizing to fulfill Godzilla's promise, meeting by meeting, project by project, so that other artists could form bonds and help each other.

It is this dedication to the daily craft of cultural work that reminds me of what I admire about all my colleagues at MOCA, from the board members to MOCA's president to the small teams that make up the education, collections, facilities, development, and communication departments. The MOCA team and leadership, like Godzilla, is diverse, coming together from different backgrounds to sustain and fulfill the promise of a cultural institution that knits together stories of Chinese in America, both locally and across the country. I understand MOCA to be a home for the culture and history of our shared and varied experiences. The scope of our mission can be seen in our current exhibition, which highlights Chinese American history organizations from around the country, and our fall 2021 exhibition in which we document New York City's three largest Chinese communities: Manhattan Chinatown; Flushing, Queens; and Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

I want to emphasize all of this about MOCA because I have been reading too many letters and statements with misconceptions about who we are, what we stand for, and the intentions behind our daily work. The questions center around the values of MOCA's leadership amid accusations that MOCA sought to gain from a disputed jail plan, among other claims. Yet, I have only known Jonathan Chu, MOCA's Board Chair, and Nancy Yao Maasbach, MOCA's President, to be supportive and caring leaders that have shouldered the responsibility of securing MOCA's

sustainability so that future generations can see Chinese American stories reflected in the vast, rippling currents of history.

To do that work, day-in and day-out, requires an unwavering faith and inextinguishable enthusiasm for the museum's mandate. I want to be clear that what MOCA leadership is fighting for is the future of MOCA and the stories of immigrant communities and cultures it collects, cares for, and shares. Their intentions regarding this are displayed in the daily work they put in to support the staff, build a solid foundation for MOCA, and lead us through uncertain times.

I must also address some factual inaccuracies from recent letters and begin to correct the public record on the following:

- MOCA has expressed its opposition to a Chinatown jail in public interviews, conversations, and meetings with hundreds of community members across the spectrum of Chinatown organizations, Asian American organizations, and community advocacy groups since plans were first announced in August 2018. MOCA has also begun documenting this moment as an important part of the history of activism in Chinatown.
- MOCA believes in an inclusive definition of community. With open arms, MOCA welcomes visitors from near and far. Through our mission-oriented work, we strive every day to serve our community which includes folks from Chinatown; students, teachers, scholars, and visitors from throughout the five boroughs, across the U.S. and around the world; as well as artists like yourselves.
- MOCA, like all non-profit cultural organizations, requires strong and ethical leadership to support our mission in serving the community. Jonathan Chu has served voluntarily as the Co-Chair of the MOCA Board since 2019. He has tirelessly supported all staff members at MOCA in our work.

I respect the right of artists to withdraw their participation from projects if they do not feel morally aligned with the presenting institution, and I believe in the importance of protest in changing attitudes and keeping power in check. But I am saddened that the story of Godzilla, the important work of its artists as individuals, and the interpretive work of contextualizing it all into art history will not be shown at MOCA, whose leadership and staff enthusiastically supported the project, with grit and determination, from its conception in 2017 to today when we decided to cancel it. I am saddened that such a hard line exists between two groups that have grown from the roots of the same struggle.

I wish all of you the best of luck with future projects, and I will be getting in touch with those of you who have already loaned materials to coordinate their return.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Herb Tam".

Herb Tam
Curator and Director of Exhibitions